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Table of Contents

Editor's Note 244

Pistols and Honor: The James Barron-Stephen Decatur Conflict, 1798-1807 245
by W. M. P. Dunne

The *Panay* Revisited: A Maritime Perspective 260
by David H. Grover

Armed Merchantmen and Privateers: Another Perspective on America's Quasi-War With France 270
by John Pelzer

Finding Longitude at Sea by Magnetic Declination on Dutch East Indiamen, 1596-1795 281
by Karel A. Davids

"Splice the Mainbrace": The Story of a Naval Epic 291
by Malcolm H. Murfett

In Memoriam: Archibald Ross Lewis 302

Index 304

EDITOR'S NOTE

IT is with both pleasure and sadness that I write my first Editor's Note for *The American Neptune*. Like the journal's many subscribers and readers, I grieve the loss of a friend and colleague, Archibald Lewis, whose contributions to the field of maritime history and to the *Neptune* are well known. A memorial statement follows the articles in this issue. At the same time, however, I welcome most gratefully the opportunity to continue the high standards of creativity and scholarship that my distinguished predecessors have brought to the journal over the past half century.

As the volume and number of the current issue indicate, the *Neptune* is now completing its fiftieth year of publication. While the journal has experienced many changes since 1940, as has the study of maritime history, this issue reflects both continuity and change. For example, the *Neptune* has always been a place to retell the stories of famous men and ships. Yet it has also reflected changing approaches to the writing of history, including an emphasis on broader social themes. W. M. P. Dunne combines these elements in this issue's first offering, an account of two famous American naval officers, which places their story in the larger context of the early nineteenth century U.S. Navy's officer corps and its all-too-often violent code of honor.

Furthermore, the journal has always recognized that the history of the sea is a history not just of navies but of merchant ships, and two of the articles herein offer maritime perspectives on what have traditionally been considered military events. In one, David H. Grover suggests that the 1937 bombing of the U.S. gunboat *Panay* by the Japanese was in fact an attack on merchant ships; in the other, John Pelzer argues that the military action that has come to be known as the Quasi-War with France was an actual war, of much greater intensity and duration than the military conflict, for America's merchant vessels.

Our journal has always acknowledged as well the importance of technology in the history of seafaring. In this issue, historian Karel A. Davids of The Netherlands explains why a particular method of finding longitude at sea was adopted, then abandoned, then readopted on sixteenth and seventeenth century Dutch East Indiamen. Finally, we know that the history of the sea is a history of danger and adventure. Our final offering is from Malcolm H. Murfett, a sequel to an article in the Summer 1989 issue of the *Neptune* which described a Chinese Communist attack on British ships in the Yangtze River shortly after the 1949 revolution. In this issue, Murfett finishes the story by recounting how the crew of one of those vessels planned and executed a daring escape.

The *Neptune*, while an American journal, has always sought nonetheless to explore the maritime world beyond American waters, during eras before the United States had a maritime history. A glance at the five-year index in this issue will show that this practice, too, has not changed, and it is our intention to continue to provide a broad international focus that covers all aspects of shipping and seafaring. We also realize that much of the study of maritime history today is done not in libraries or archives but in and under the sea itself, and future issues will include the latest discoveries of underwater archaeologists. Such a timely and diverse range of offerings places this journal at the cutting edge of maritime scholarship, both national and international.

But more than that, the *Neptune* offers those of us who read it a journey to times and places to which we are irresistably drawn, because we love the sea and ships. I hope our journey will be a pleasant one, with a fair wind.

TIMOTHY J. RUNYAN

Cleveland, Ohio

Pistols and Honor: The James Barron-Stephen Decatur Conflict, 1798-1807

W. M. P. DUNNE

ON March 22, 1820, Commodore James Barron shot and killed Commodore Stephen Decatur, Jr., in a duel. The enmity between them existed for some 14 years. They first met in 1798, and until 1806 their relationship was cordial and at times very close. Decatur once told a friend that in 1804 Barron was "more than a father to him."[1] It is that early relationship this article will search for the source for the animus that poisoned their once healthy comradeship-in-arms.

When newly-warranted, nineteen-year-old Midshipman Stephen Decatur, Jr., signed on board the frigate *United States* on May Day 1798, he is reported to have arrived under the shadow of a civilian murder charge. The alleged crime took place on a Philadelphia street when a prostitute approached Decatur on his daily walk to his family's home at South Front Street from the waterfront offices of Gurney & Smith on the corner of Front and Union Street, where he was a junior clerk. A newspaper article later said that Decatur, "being greatly incensed at the conduct of a woman of doubtful integrity one day, he delt her a blow which resulted in her instant death. For this he was arrested and tried for life, but through the skillful management of his case by two prominent lawyers, Bedford and Sargent [*sic*], he was acquitted." The 1874 article, bylined simply "Observer" and written at Decatur's birthplace of Berlin, Maryland, reveals a rather different image from the chaste, respectful, and devoted childhood described by Decatur's biographers:[2] "Stephen is said to have been in his raising quite a desperate youth," the article states. "His father could exercise little restraining authority over him. He was self-willed, high spirited, dissipated and reckless. He was finally persuaded to enter a certain well-known mercantile house, but grew worse and worse."[3]

Without suggesting their endorsement of his argument and observations, the author wishes to express his appreciation to William S. Dudley, J. Worth Estes, Leonard F. Guttridge, Frederick C. Leiner, David F. Long, Christopher McKee, William J. Morgan, Portia Takakjian, James Valle, and Virginia Steele Wood for reading and commenting upon early drafts of this monograph, which is an expanded version of a paper first presented at the 1990 annual meeting of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. Additional thanks are extended to Henry P. Silka, for his usual meticulous and thoughtful editing.

1. Leonard F. Guttridge and Jay D. Smith, The *Commodores* (London: Peter Davies, 1970), 324, citing a letter of Captain Arthur Sinclair, U.S.N., to Caesar Rodney, April 17, 1820, in the Caesar Rodney Collection, Delaware Historical Society, Wilmington, Delaware.

2. Marion V. Brewington has pointed out that "with the possible exception of John Paul Jones, no officer of the United States Navy has been the subject of so much printed matter as Stephen Decatur, junior. James Barron's bullet had scarcely done its work before the first formal biography appeared in print" (Book review, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 62 [January 1938], 1:105-106). Decatur's biographers include, but are not limited to: Irvin Anthony (1931), Cyrus Townsend Brady (1900), Charles Lee Lewis (1937), Alexander Slidell Mackenzie (1846), Helen Nicolay (1942), and Samuel Putnam Waldo (1821). Alexander Slidell Mackenzie, *Life of Stephen Decatur, A Commodore in the Navy of the United States* (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1846), although to a great extent pure hagiography, remains the best secondary source for details of Decatur's life. Mackenzie was an erudite contemporary naval officer, and a recognized writer. To construct his biography he interviewed, among others, Salvatore Catalano, Susan Wheeler Decatur, J.K. Hamilton, Bishop John Henry Hobart, Ambassador Richard Rush, Francis Gurney Smith, Commodore Charles Stewart, Littleton Waller Tazewell, and in her extreme old age, Decatur's first schoolmistress, Mrs. Gordon.

3. *Wilmington Daily Commercial*, Delaware, Tuesday, December 22, 1874, 2nd edition, p. 1, c. 4 (Library of Congress, Washington, D.C., hereafter referred to as DLC). The author identifies himself as "Observer," a "Special Correspondent of the *Commercial*," writing from Berlin, Maryland, Decatur's birthplace on December 15, 1874. "Bedford" was probably Gunning Bedford, a prominent Delaware jurist (Joseph G.E. Hopkins, Managing ed., *Concise Dictionary of American Biography* [New York: Charles Scribners Sons, 1964]). "Sargeant" was probably John Sergeant, a young Philadelphia attorney from the office of Jared Ingersoll, who may have been a classmate of Decatur's at the Academy of the College of Pennsylvania, which he attended until the spring of 1794 (Honorable William M. Meredith, *Eulogium on the Character and Services of the late John Sergeant pronounced at the request of the Select and Common Councils of the City of Philadelphia, and a committee appointed at a meeting of citizens, April 22, 1853* [Philadelphia: Crissy & Markey, Printers, 1853], 6).

Decatur's father, Stephen, Sr., a privateersman of note in the American Revolution, and a postwar merchant shipmaster and owner, spent much of his time at sea. Stephen, Jr. is reputed to have first traveled upon the ocean to cure a bout of whooping cough, or it may have been at the behest of his mother, who appears to have been unable to control his behavior. For either reason, his parents decided he should take a journey with his father. Accordingly, young Stephen crossed the Atlantic during the summer of 1787 on board the *Ariel*, bound for the River Gironde and its famous wine-port, Bordeaux. In their shared lifetimes, this voyage may well have been the longest and most intimate period of togetherness for the father and his oldest son. Of equal moment, acquired at age eight, it was Decatur's only significant sea time before receiving his midshipman's warrant. Stephen, Sr., from the time of his son's birth until the boy went into the Navy, spent most of his time away from home. After a childhood and young adulthood deprived of a father's companionship, Decatur spent the first five years of his naval career in close companionship with James Barron, and next to none with his father.

To begin his education Decatur received either tutoring or primary schooling under the guidance of a Mrs. Gordon, a woman to whom he maintained an exceptional allegiance.[4] The autumn after his return from France he seems to have begun studying under the direction of the Reverend Doctor James Abercrombie, D.D., of Christ's Church, a sometimes tutor at the "The Academy of the Protestant Episcopal Church of North America in the City of Philadelphia," on Fourth Street. Two other naval-heroes-to-be, Charles Stewart and Richard Somers, as well as the future statesman, Richard Rush, were among his fellow students. When the Protestant Episcopal Academy suffered financial difficulties and temporarily closed in 1790, Decatur transferred to the grammar school of Philadelphia's College of Pennsylvania, which he attended for a few terms, possibly with John Sergeant, his defense attorney in the murder case. A youthful incident, later recalled by Ambassador Richard Rush, describes Decatur's innate fearlessness:

> We used to bathe in the Delaware near a bank called the "Old Fort," in the neighborhood of where the navy yard now is. Once, while the boys were swimming about, a few made for a ship moored to a wharf at hand, that they might dive from her side. One of them ran up the bowsprit quite out to the tip end of the jibboom, from which he instantly plunged head foremost into the stream. It was Decatur. Shouts rose from the boys, and the very sailors may have been amazed, as the ship was large and the height seemed fearful.[5]

Decatur, a natural swimmer, was to be unusual among his future navy colleagues, most of whom, like William Bainbridge, could not swim a stroke.

The Philadelphia prostitute Decatur allegedly assaulted would not have been the first to suffer at the hand of this sensitive, but quick-tempered youngster. That he was capable of violence is admitted by one of his most worshipful biographers, Alexander Slidell Mackenzie:

> [Decatur] was returning, on a Saturday afternoon [in 1793], in company with young [J.K.] Hamilton, from a fishing excursion to Hollander's Creek, which lies three or four miles below Philadelphia. As they approached his house on Front Street, near Cedar, Stephen saw his mother raising and consoling his younger brother John, who, it appeared, had received a violent blow from a person of respectable family, but dissipated habits, upon whom the boy had played some childish prank, as boys are apt to do with tipsy people. The mother, in the same breath, soothed her son, and reproved his assailant for his unmanly conduct in striking a child. Instead of an apology, the man replied with abuse; and Stephen having quickened his pace, approached to hear reviled that mother whose admirable qualities came in aid of natural affection to fix his enthusiastic reverence and love. Dropping his rod and basket on the pavement, he stood before the assailant and said to him, "Do you know who that lady is, Sir? This is my mother; she must be treated with respect!" The man replied, that he neither knew nor cared who she was. Stephen then said to him, "If you have any complaint to make against my brother, Sir, make it to me." The infuriated man, giving way to his brutal passion, made a blow at Stephen, who, parrying it, struck back so vigorously, that his antagonist fell with violence to the pavement, and was seriously injured.[6]

Even as a teenager Decatur possessed the character, courage, and physical strength to defend his honored

4. "But no incident of his life was more grateful to her [Ann Pine Decatur's] maternal heart, or gave her more pleasure in the narration, than the object to which he devoted his first month's pay; to alleviate the wants of an aged an needy widow, of the name of Gordon, whose husband, a shipmaster, had been lost at sea, and who had been his first teacher in childhood." (Mackenzie, *Decatur*, 24). "On Decatur's return [from the first West Indies cruise of the *United States*], one of his earliest visits was to his aged widowed schoolmistress, to whom he brought from the West Indies a bag of coffee, and a barrel of sugar, doubly welcome, doubtless, from the considerate kindness that prompted a gift, which was long after remembered, and recounted by the grateful garrulity of old age" (Mackenzie, *Decatur*, 37).

5. Charles Latham, *History of The Episcopal Academy*, 19*n*; Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 16; Irvin Anthony, *Decatur* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1931), 18; Charles Lee Lewis, *The Romantic Decatur* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1937), 6; Richard Rush to Susan Wheeler Decatur, 22 May 1840, Appendix I in Mackenzie, *Decatur*, 357.

6. Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 14.

Commodore Stephen Decatur, by Rembrandt Peale, courtesy of the New-York Historical Society

Commodore James Barron, from a miniature by the Danish court painter ca. 1814, courtesy of The War Memorial Museum of Virginia, Newport News, Virginia.

mother and youngest brother from the bullying of an inebriated ne'er-do-well.

Decatur is reputed to have begun his working life at Gurney & Smith's countinghouse in 1796; but if the long-standing tale that he went to New Jersey with the woodmen to get out the keel pieces of the *United States* has any basis in fact, the 1796 date is not supportable. Secretary of War Timothy Pickering reported to Vice President John Adams on 15 December 1795, on the progress in building the 44-gun ship at Philadelphia: "The keel is completed and laid on the blocks. The pieces are scarfed and bolted to each other in the best manner." By the end of 1795, therefore, Joshua Humphreys had assembled the keel in his Southwark shipyard, which means the wood had been cut not later than the winter of 1794-1795, well before the traditional date Stephen joined Gurney & Smith, unless he began his working life in mid-to-late 1794 at age fifteen, or even earlier—a distinct possibility, as there is no biographical record of his attending school, or being employed, between 1792 and 1796.[7]

During the time Decatur worked at the waterfront merchants he became involved in what may well have been his first serious romance. Although firm evidence of the identity of the young lady is lacking, research to date points to Mary King, granddaughter of Rufus King, or another relative of that noted Federalist politician. The romance blossomed when King and his family were in Philadelphia, then the nation's capital city, during King's tenure as a Senator from New York. When King left the city in 1796 to serve as the United States minister to

7. Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 17-18; Lewis, *Romantic Decatur*, 7; Anthony, *Decatur*, 23, 28-29; Asbury Dickens and John W. Forney, eds., *American State Papers, Class VI, Naval Affairs, Documents, Legislative and Executive, of the Congress of the United States*, 4 vols. (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 1861), 1:18. Lewis makes no mention of Decatur being involved in getting out the frigate's keel pieces.

Great Britain, Miss King remained in Philadelphia. The romance lasted until November 1805, when Decatur met his future wife, Susan Wheeler, in Norfolk, Virginia.

In later life, Decatur deeply regretted the paucity of his education, most especially after his first meeting with the stunningly beautiful and cosmopolitan sophisticate he married. Boyhood friend Richard Rush, the son of Dr. Benjamin Rush, recounted a pertinent conversation. The discourse took place during February 1806, when the Navy's newest captain visited his family at Frankford, Pennsylvania, where the elder Decatur had founded a gunpowder factory:

> [Dr. Rush] found "Stephen," as he was accustomed to call your husband, having known him from childhood, more than usually disposed to conversation. At last he said, "Doctor, I am going to speak to you as to a friend. By good fortune, I have risen fast in my profession, but my rank is ahead of my acquirements. I went young into the navy; my education was cut short, and I neglected the opportunities of improvement I had when a boy. For professional knowledge I hope to get along, expecting to increase it as I grow older; but for other kinds of knowledge, I feel my deficiencies, and want your friendly aid towards getting the better of them. Will you favor me with a list of such books, historical, and others of a standard nature, as you think will best answer my purpose, that I may devote myself at all intervals to the perusal of them?"

Dr. Rush acquiesced, and Decatur became an avid reader throughout his life. In 1815 this interest attracted President James Madison. Rush continued in his letter:

> Let me add, as known to me, that Mr. Madison, of whose cabinet, in 1815 and 1816, I was a young and humble member, (and here I am alluding to those years,) was impressed with the enlargement of your husband's views and conversation, and, above all, his enlightened thirst for correct knowledge of the true elements of our constitutional government. Well indeed did he know, that he was addressing himself to the fountain-head of such knowledge, in whatever inquiries he made of his illustrious friend and neighbor, who, in turn, was always ready to shed light on such inquiries. In this connection, it is also known to me, that Mr. Madison kindly designated, with his own pencil or pen, in the copy of the Federalist, which the Commodore was reading, the numbers of that great work written by General Hamilton, Mr. Jay, or himself.[8]

To be guided through the Federalist Papers by Madison, their predominant author, and arguably America's greatest political theorist, is one of Decatur's many unparalleled experiences.

Returning to 1797, through the good offices of his father, who prevailed upon his friend John Barry, commanding officer of the *United States* and the Navy's senior officer, Stephen received a recommendation for a midshipman's warrant. Commodore Barry had hoped to get to sea for the summer, but his aspiration failed to materialize. Over the ensuing winter, to better prepare his son for naval service, Stephen, Sr. engaged a former Royal Navy officer, Talbot Hamilton, to tutor the boy in nautical science.[9]

As a young adult, Decatur stood over 5 ft. 10 in., with a sinewy, erect bearing. Large eyes, an aquiline nose, and wavy, dark brown hair highlighted his handsome Latinate features. He has been described as, "a man of prepossessing physique, keen black eyes, high forehead and compressed lips, indicating that indomitable persistence that characterized his career as a naval officer." In later life, Captain Robert T. Spence, U.S.N., who had served under Decatur at Tripoli, extolled his friend: "It was under such circumstances I first saw the generous and chivalrous Decatur; a man more unique, more highly endowed, than any other I ever knew; to whom, perhaps, the country is most indebted for that naval renown, which is the admiration of the world; a renown so associated with the name of Decatur, as to render them indissoluble." Despite his mercurial temper Decatur is reputed to have refrained from profanity. The same reporter who described the murder of the street walker attributed Decatur's character metamorphosis to his naval career: "His life was changed entirely after he entered the navy. There he was at home. He had no taste nor fitness for anything else."[10]

Once he entered on board the *United States*, Decatur came under the guidance of its third lieutenant, James Barron, whose shared ship-handling and command expertise would counteract Decatur's lack of experience in those areas. Barron, a Virginia tidewater native who "stood over six feet tall, with deep chest and broad shoulders, developed by his seafaring life," countenanced a mien that "revealed a force of character and self-confidence which bespoke the successful young ship captain who had already had long experience in handling rough crews and who had brought his ship through many a gale." Custom divided ships into two watches, starboard and larboard. The first and third lieutenants supervised the starboard watch, assisted by half of the midshipmen. Decatur was assigned to Barron's starboard watch.[11]

8. Rush to Wheeler Decatur, 22 May 1840.

9. William Bell Clark, *Gallant John Barry 1745-1803* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1938), 402; Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 25.

10. Mackenzie, *Decatur*, 35-36; "Observer," *Wilmington Daily Commercial*, December 22, 1874.

11. William Oliver Stevens, *An Affair of Honor, the Biography of Commodore James Barron, U.S.N.* (Chesapeake, Virginia: Norfolk County Historical Society, 1969), 18-19. Stevens, a Phi Beta Kappa

The same year Decatur had transferred to the grammar school of the College of Pennsylvania, his new watch officer, who was ten-years his senior, had married a daughter of a leading Virginia family, Elizabeth Mosely Armistead. It proved to be a long, loving relationship that endured and cushioned the chronic adversity Barron suffered through his later career. The Barron-Armistead union produced its first child, Jane, in 1791. In time this daughter united with her mother to become a steadfast supporter of her father through his years of emotional travail. When Jane was seven, President John Adams signed Barron's lieutenant's commission, and he joined the frigate's wardroom before the end of March 1798.[12]

By 13 June, the country now committed to the Quasi-War with France, the *United States* had dropped down the Delaware River to Chester. First Lieutenant David Ross reported to Commodore Barry, who was still in Philadelphia, that the ship had received its powder and stores, the water had been filled, and the officers were in good health. Ross then took the ship further downriver to Newcastle, Delaware, where Second Lieutenant John Mullowny logged the commodore's arrival on the Fourth of July. Four mornings later young Decatur experienced a thrill of familial pride:

> At dawn on 8 July 1798, [Captain Stephen Decatur, Sr.] made his way up the Delaware River with his prize [the French privateer *La Croyable*]. Ahead in the early morning mist loomed a large frigate he recognized as the *United States* 44, commanded by the navy's senior captain, John Barry. Decatur hailed the ship, bringing Barry to the deck, and told the tale of his victory. The officers of the frigate lined the side of their ship, among them Stephen Decatur, Jr., a midshipman.

The *United States*, ready for sea at last, cleared the Delaware Capes on 13 July headed for Boston, and then the West Indies for its first Quasi-War cruise, a mission that gave Decatur his baptism under enemy fire.[13]

During their return voyage to the United States, James Barron enjoyed one of his finest hours. On 19 October the *United States* ran headlong into a violent gale. A rogue wave damaged its figurehead and, later, "a sudden blast of wind split the foresail." The crew went aloft to reduce sail and "handed the weather side," so that the ship could "lay to under goose wing." The ship still pitched heavily; another massive wave smashed into it and cracked the bowsprit, thereby threatening a domino effect that would cause all the masts to go by the board. The Gulf Stream's warm air currents worsened this perilous situation by having softened and slackened the tar-reinforced hempen rigging. With the shrouds and stays thus loosened, the frigate's towering masts shifted dangerously in their steps. Barron went into action:

> In this critical situation, Lieutenant Barron suggested to Commodore Barry the possibility of setting up the rigging and thereby saving the masts; offering himself to undertake the performance of this duty, the difficulty of which was increased by the ships being before the wind, and rolling unceasingly. Commodore Barry consented to have the hazardous experiment tried, when Lieutenant Barron succeeded in getting the rigging taut, and the lanyards secured without accident.[14]

Without doubt Barron saved the frigate from destruction in that storm off Cape Hatteras. Six months later, Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert solicited Barry to recommend officers deserving promotion. The commodore wrote, "my third lieutenant James Barron, is as good an Officer and as fit to command as any in the service, and I hope when you do promote him, you will give him a Ship that will enable him to do credit to himself and honor to his country." Of his young gentlemen, Barry recommended Somers and Decatur for promotion. The Secretary took Barry at his word and elevated Barron to captain, and the younger men to lieutenant. When he passed Barron's recommendation to President John Adams, Stoddert added his own approbation, "Lieutenant Barron of the same Ship is represented

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graduate of Colby College, received his Ph.D. in literature from Yale University in 1905. In addition to teaching English at the U.S. Naval Academy for a score of years, he co-authored the *History of Seapower* with Allan Westcott in 1920, which remained a required history text at Annapolis for thirty-five years. "Few Annapolitans are aware, however, that during the two decades Stevens lived in the Ancient City, from 1903 to 1924, his reputation was built on works of a different kind. Between 1906 and 1913 he wrote and illustrated a series of satiric booklets that lampooned the city's legendary complacency and attempted to laugh its residents into the twentieth century." (Michael P. Parker, "Alphabetical [Dis-]order: The Annapolis Satires of William Oliver Stevens," *Maryland Historical Magazine* 85 [Spring 1990], 1:15-43).

12. Stevens, *Affair of Honor*, 18-19; commission of Lieutenant James Barron, 9 March 1798, and Moses Myers to Commodore John Barry, 10 April 1798, James Barron Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va.

13. Ross to Barry, 13 July 1798, John Barry Papers, New York Public Library; Journal of Lieutenant John Mullowny, U.S. Frigate *United States*, 4 and 13 July 1798, Records of the Bureau of Personnel, Record Group 24, National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (hereafter cited as RG 24, DNA); Michael A. Palmer, *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 32.

14. Mullowny Journal, 18 October 1798, R.G. 24, DNA; Clark, *Barry*, 428. To "hand" the sail of a square-rigger is to furl the sail to the yardarm beginning with the leeward leech (outer, vertical edge of the sail). "Goose wing" refers to a square sail whose center section (bunt) has been furled while the clews remain in place, thereby creating, in effect, two smaller sails of lesser total area than the original single sail.

by Barry, *and indeed by every Officer in the Navy, with whom I have communicated on the subject, as one of the best officers in the service.*" Barron's protégé, Decatur, through his God-given gifts, his own father's example, and a year spent under the Virginian's tutelage, earned recognition as a promising officer.[15]

In the nineteenth-century world of the gentlemen's code of honor, and frequent challenges to duel, Decatur's first experience on the "field of honor" came as a result of his lifelong friendship with Richard Somers. According to Leonard F. Guttridge and Jay D. Smith:

> Dueling was already established among naval officers as the most fashionable method of settling quarrels; two-thirds as many were to die from this cause as in all America's sea fights between 1798 and the Civil War.... Stephen Decatur, as principle or second, participated in several duels or near duels. Such was its terminal nature that the pastime can scarcely be called habit-forming, otherwise he may be said to have been an addict. Yet he was not bloodthirsty. An excellent marksman, who never shot to kill, he could place the pistol ball wherever he wished.[16]

Among the many duels that took place during the formative days of the American sailing navy the Somers duel was the most extreme. Sometime before their advancement to lieutenant, in front of several other middies, Somers bantered Decatur about his foppish dress in the gunroom. Defensively Decatur jocularly accused Somers of playing the fool. Somers laughed it off and the two forgot the event. Not so their companions, who later refused to drink with Somers on the basis that fear had held him back from calling Decatur to account for sullying his honor. They insisted that his only course was to challenge his former schoolmate. The spirited and fearless Somers, not about to duel with his closest friend, challenged his tormentors instead, and engaged Decatur as his second. On the appointed day, the midshipmen went ashore under the agreement that Somers would duel each of his six doubters at one hour intervals. In the first engagement Somers took a bullet in his arm, and in the next a far more serious wound to his thigh. Before the third round he fainted from loss of blood, but recovered. Despite Decatur's pleading and offers to stand for him, Somers refused to back down. He insisted that Decatur prop him up into a sitting position, from which he wounded his next opponent. At this point all agreed that "honor" had been served and Somers' courage was no longer in doubt.[17]

From July 1799 though April 1800 the *United States* cruised along the coast and made a diplomatic voyage to Portugal. Barron now ranked as flag captain to the commodore. Charles Stewart jumped from fourth to first lieutenant; Richard Somers became second and Decatur third. Just before the ship sailed, the newly commissioned Decatur first assumed the principal's role in a duel. Barron sent him up to Philadelphia to recruit some additional seamen on 2 July. After Decatur paid enlistment bounties to some new hands, the mate of an Indiaman inveigled the recruits away with a higher bonus and higher wages. Decatur went on board and reclaimed the sailors. Harsh words ensued with the mate. The naval officer took affront, a challenge ensued, and the two men met on shore at Newcastle. Decatur emerged victorious and unhurt, having shot his opponent in the hip.[18]

Upon its return to Philadelphia in the spring of 1800, the *United States* required a major refit. While the repair work took place the Navy Department assigned Decatur to the small gun-brig *Norfolk*, as first lieutenant for a convoy cruise to Cartagena and Cap François, Haiti, no mean assignment for an officer so young in his rank. According to one account, Decatur again came under enemy fire when his ship fought a bitter engagement with *two* French privateers, and took command of the brig when the enemy's fire wounded Lieutenant Commandant Thomas Calvert. A contemporary newspaper story, however, stated that the *Norfolk* had two armed American merchant brigs in convoy and *one* privateer mounted the attack. Final confirmation of this version comes from Captain Alexander Murray, U.S.N. On 25 October 1800, he scolded Calvert in writing for failing to capture a single enemy ship, when he had three armed vessels under his command. Neither the newspaper nor Murray mention Calvert having been wounded.[19]

15. John Barry to Benjamin Stoddert, dated Prince Rupert's Bay, Dominica, 16 March 1799 (Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S.N. [Ret.], ed., *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War Between the United States and France*, 7 vols. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1934-1938], 2:474), hereafter referred to as *NavDocs, QW*; Stoddert to John Adams, 25 May 1799, *NavDocs, QW*, 3:253, emphasis added.

16. Guttridge and Smith, *Commodores*, 84.

17. Charles Washington Goldsborough, *The Naval Chronicle, Volume I* (Washington: James Wilson, 1824), 237-238.

18. Mackenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 37-39. Before leaving the frigate Decatur informed Lieutenant Charles Stewart of his intention to shoot his opponent in this precise location. Stewart related this fact to Mackenzie during an interview with the author. It is one of several pieces of evidence that confirm Decatur's prowess with a pistol.

19. Charles Washington Goldsborough, Chief Clerk of the Navy Department, for Secretary of the Navy Benjamin Stoddert, to Decatur, "You will place yourself on board the Brig *Norfolk*, under the com-

At the time Decatur sailed on the *Norfolk*, Commodore Barry granted Barron a furlough to visit his family at Hampton, Virginia. While enroute home during the early summer of 1800 a minor episode occurred that left him with his first professional enemy. The frigate *Insurgent* (formerly *l'Insurgente*, a captured French frigate taken into the U.S. Navy) had returned from its first cruise and had undergone a refit at Baltimore under the direction of the ship's commander, Captain Alexander Murray, Barron's senior. Curious to examine the French method of warship construction, Barron visited the *Insurgent*, which lay at anchor off Fells Point, and inspected it in great detail alow and aloft. He concluded that although the ship was well-built, the caliber of the refit was so poor as to jeopardize its safety in heavy conditions. Never one to hide his disdain with shipboard shortcuts, Barron detailed his observations in a letter written at Baltimore to a friend, the Virginia Congressman, Col. Josiah Parker, stating that "he would not go to sea in her for the world." Murray soon learned of Barron's opinion and resented it greatly. The *Insurgent*, under a new commander, departed from Norfolk on August 8th and was never heard from again—the frigate foundered in the fierce equinoctial gales of September 1800. "Barron's grim prediction came true.... And Murray? Thereafter he became a lifelong enemy of Barron."[20]

When Decatur returned to duty on board the *United States*, he learned that both Barron and Stewart had been rewarded with their own ships. Master Commandant Cyrus Talbot replaced Barron as flag-captain, Somers moved up to first lieutenant, while Decatur took over as second. Charles Stewart began his own rise to fame in command of the speedy schooner *Experiment*, but the ill-fortune that was to bedevil James Barron for the remainder of his life began with his new command, the fever-plagued 20-gun ship *Warren*. The dreaded yellow fever had decimated its previous crew, killing skipper Master Commandant Timothy Newman, along with his son Midshipman John Newman, the nephew and grand-nephew of Cabinet member Timothy Pickering, and nearly half of the ship's company. Barron no sooner reached the West Indies station with the *Warren* in December 1800, than he too came down with yellow fever. For the balance of his life, however, he suffered regular bouts of ague, which suggests that he may have contracted malaria as well. When dispatches arrived in the Windward Islands with news of a peace treaty with France, Barron arranged for Cyrus Talbot to pilot the *Warren* back to Boston, while he traveled to the United States on the frigate *New-York*.[21]

The Quasi-War had no sooner wound down than an old threat to American commerce emerged from the Barbary States of North Africa and President Thomas Jefferson ordered a squadron "of training and observation" to the Mediterranean under Commodore Richard Dale. Both Barron and Decatur sailed with the squadron in June 1801—Barron in command of the flagship, *President*, and Decatur as first lieutenant of the medium frigate *Essex*.

At Barcelona occurred another of those incidents that crop up throughout Decatur's life. They may be properly attributed to his very personal and ultra-refined concept of the gentleman's code, as well as to his rigid sense of honor—the touchstones of Decatur's naval career. He was returning from the waterfront to the *Essex* one night in early August, and as his boat passed under the counter of the harbor guardship, a Spanish officer insulted Decatur. The incident was all the more aggravated because the same Spaniards had fired shots over Captain Bainbridge's head the previous evening. Decatur announced that he would return to the Spanish warship in the morning to

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mand of Lieut. Calvert," *NavDocs, QW*, 5:517; Lewis, *The Romantic Decatur*, 30; *Salem Gazette*, Salem, Massachusetts, 23 September 1800, DLC; Murray to Calvert, 25 October 1800, Correspondence of Alexander Murray, commanding the *Constellation*, the *Insurgente*, and the *Adams*, June 1799-Dec. 1805, Entry 395, RG 45, DNA.

20. James Barron to Congressman Josiah Parker, 16 April 1800, James Barron Papers. Parker had been the Chairman of House of Representatives Committee on Naval Equipments; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 38.

21. Stoddert to Barron, 15 and 23 September 1800, Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, 1798-1868, vol. 4, hereafter referred to as Officers Letters, RG 45, DNA; Journal of Sailing Master Joseph Whitmore kept on board the U.S. Ship *Warren*, Historical Society of Old Newburyport, Newbury, Massachusetts; *Columbian Centinel*, Boston, Massachusetts, 10 September 1800, DLC; Journal of Lieutenant Commandant John Mullowny kept on board the U.S. Ship *Ganges*, 29 March 1801, RG 24, DNA; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 28; Samuel Smith for Acting Secretary of the Navy Henry Dearborn to Talbot, 1 June 1801, Officers Letters, vol. 5, RG 45, DNA. My thanks to Dr. J. Worth Estes for suggesting this distant and difficult double diagnosis (Letter, J. Worth Estes, M.D. to the author, 16 September 1990). For reference to Barron's fevers see Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Wharton, U.S.M.C., to Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., 24 August 1806, quoted in Charles Oscar Paullin, *Commodore John Rodgers, Captain, Commodore, and Senior Officer of the American Navy 1773-1838* (Cleveland: The Arthur H. Clark Company, 1910), 178 and 181; Barron to Decatur, 30 November 1819, published in, The Friends of Stephen Decatur, *Correspondence Between the late Commodore Stephen Decatur and Commodore James Barron Which Led to the Unfortunate Meeting of the Twenty-second of March 1820* (Washington: Gales & Seaton, 1820). Forty-three crewmen died on the Warren's first cruise, thirty-nine from yellow fever.

call the offender out, which he did. Upon being informed that the Spanish lieutenant was not on board, Decatur said, "Well, then, tell him that Lieutenant Decatur, of the frigate *Essex*, pronounces him a cowardly scoundrel, and that, when they meet on shore, he will cut his ears off." He pursued his antagonist into town, but failed to encounter him. Squadron duties intervened, the *Essex* sailed, and the *contretemps* came to nought.[22]

James Barron also suffered at the hands of the Spanish on 30 November 1801, during his tenure as flag captain in the Mediterranean:

> An accident occurred, by which the *President* came near being lost. She had gone into Mahon, and the pilot, miscalculating the draught of water, struck a rock in the starboard hand of that narrow passage, in quitting the harbour. The ship had five or six knots of way on her, at the time, and she ran up three or four feet before her motion was lost. It was a breathless instant, and the first impression was very general, that she must infallibly go down. Rolling heavily, the hull settled off towards the passage, slid from the rock, and again floated.[23]

A rush of water poured through the *President*'s badly damaged bow. That night, in the throes of jury-rigging repairs, the ship did battle with a furious gale, one of the Mediterranean's notorious northerly *mistrals*. When the weather moderated, Barron made for the French navy yard at Toulon where the frigate was hove down. With a new French forefoot, the ship went on to complete its first Barbary Wars tour of duty.[24]

On board the *Essex* the ship's company spent a boring winter on patrol and convoy duty. Discipline was far less harsh than the typical Bainbridge command, a fact that Bainbridge's biographer David F. Long attributes to Decatur:

> There is reason to conclude from the evidence that discipline on the *Essex* during 1801 and 1802 was gentler than on board the *George Washington* the year before. Stephen Decatur is quite likely the reason. . . . Decatur was "Number One" on the *Essex*, and he was an officer for whom his subordinates felt trust and affection. . . . "He did not have to resort to cruelty and oaths to discipline his crew, but he had the power of inspiring his men . . . and they obeyed him because they liked him and had confidence in the power of his leadership."[25]

Even Decatur, however, could not dissuade his impetuous midshipmen from resorting to the *code duello*. In a 26 March 1802 report he informed Bainbridge that "Mr. Higinbothom & Mr. Swartwout Midshipmen with several others had permission to go on shore [at Algeciras on the Spanish side of Gibraltar Bay] & that the above named Gentlemen had fought without his knowledge & Mr. Swartwout was brought on board dead."[26]

If patrolling and convoying had been monotonous, an assignment for the *Essex* to blockade a Tripolitan warship at Gibraltar throughout the spring and early summer became thoroughly wearisome for the crew. The ship returned to New York on July 23rd, where the Sandy Hook pilot boat delivered revised orders from the secretary of the navy, who directed Bainbridge to bring the ship to the Washington Navy Yard and discharge the men there. When the sailors learned they would be paid off "on a tobacco plantation in Virginia," an unflattering reference to the new capital, the captain "discovered symptoms of mutiny among the crew, owing to information they recd. from the Newspapers of the ship being ordered to Washington." A sea lawyer among the enlisted men wrote a letter to the skipper underlining "their determination not to proceed." Bainbridge and Decatur acted promptly. They shackled eighteen crewmen, took on provisions, and sailed for the capital, where the *Essex* safely arrived on August 9th.[27]

Earlier, when Barron returned to Washington with the *President* in May 1802, the Navy Department honored him with independent command of the thirty-six gun frigate, *New-York*. In preference to a pair of senior lieutenants on the beach, John Shaw and John McRea, the friendly working association Barron and Decatur had enjoyed during their shared Quasi-War cruises on the *United States* prompted the Virginian to pay the Philadelphian the compliment of requesting his services as the *New-York*'s first lieutenant. For Decatur, one of the few officers without merchant marine experience before his entry into the Navy, the opportunity to again work with the deeply experienced Barron provided a timely benefit to his career. Without receiving leave, he literally walked

22. Log of the U.S. Frigate *Essex*, 2-3 August 1801, RG 24, DNA; William Bainbridge to the Captain General of the Province of Catalonia, 3 August 1801, quoted in H.A.S. Dearborn, *The Life of William Bainbridge, Esq. of the United States Navy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931 originally printed in 1816), 43-44; David F. Long, *Ready to Hazard, A Biography of Commodore William Bainbridge, 1774-1833* (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1981), 61-63.

23. James Fenimore Cooper, *The History of the Navy of the United States of America*, 2 vols. (Philadelphia: Lea & Blanchard, 1839), 1:349.

24. The "forefoot" is the point at which the stem is joined to the forward end of the keel.

25. Long, *Bainbridge*, 64-65, citing Mackenzie, *Decatur*.

26. *Essex* log, 27 March 1802, RG 24, DNA.

27. *Essex* log, 23 July-9 August 1802, RG 24, DNA; Long, *Bainbridge*, 66-67.

off the *Essex* at Washington Navy Yard in mid-August onto the *New-York* to rejoin Barron, who was in the midst of recommissioning the ship. Having the services of his new executive officer pleased the captain no end, as the frigate was under immediate orders to proceed to the Mediterranean with a $30,000 tribute payment to the Dey of Algiers, and then to join the squadron of Commodore Richard V. Morris. The other lieutenants were Charles Gordon as second, and Henry Van Dyke as third. They sailed from Washington for Norfolk in early September, but some of the ship's company began to exhibit a variety of fever symptoms, and by the time they reached Hampton Roads on the 14th several apparently suffered from infectious hepatitis. Barron and his surgeon, Dr. Peter St. Medard, who categorized the men's ailments as "jaundice," "dysentery," and "bilious complaints," quarantined the sick sailors under the charge of Midshipman William Lewis who described the situation, and his new commanding officer, in a personal letter:

> I write to you from on board a Tender, which is anchored about two hundred yards from the ship, and in which I am stationed to take care of a parcel of sick men; about thirty. . . . Capt. Barron is a man of warm passions, but good natured withall. In the line of his Profession, I am told he is extremely clever, and from what I can judge, I believe it to be true; in other respects his education has not been very liberal. He possesses a strong understanding notwithstanding.[28]

Barron, given that he was not quite twelve when he received his appointment to the Virginia naval service, never had an opportunity to acquire a "liberal" education.

But despite the academic deficiency he and Decatur shared, they handled adversity well together on board the *New-York*, for in addition to the fever epidemic the ship suffered other difficulties on the way down to Norfolk. The senior marine officer, Lieutenant William S. Osborn, (who was to mortally wound Lieutenant Van Dyke in a duel at Malta on 12 January 1803, as a result of a billiards parlor argument), reported the accidental death of a topman to the Marine Corps commandant: "I have only time to inform you that about 8 OClock this morning we lost our fore top & fore top Gallant & Main top Gallant Masts, with the loss of only one man." Decatur conducted a survey of the topmasts and determined, "from their having been expos'd to the Sun that they are dry and unfit for Sea Service," a situation that had to be corrected at Norfolk before the frigate could attempt a transocean passage. Barron wrote to the secretary on 14 September outlining all the problems suffered as a result of poor preparation for *New-York*'s 1801 "mothballing," shortcomings that continued to plague the skipper and his first lieutenant for months to come.[29] Several days after the ship finally cleared the Virginia Capes for Gibraltar it encountered a gale that lasted more than a week. Lewis later described it:

> We met with a severe gale of wind which lasted nearly eight days. . . . We housed the guns the first evening, and the Capt. who is one of the experienced and able seamen in the service endeavoured as much as possible to put the Ship in a state for riding out the gale; but notwithstanding all his precaution & skill, we expected to roll away our masts, and were prepared to clear the wreck in case of such an event.

Upon arrival at Gibraltar Decatur received shocking news of the death of his brother-in-law, Captain James McKnight, U.S.M.C. While serving on board the *Constellation* the Marine had been shot through the heart in a duel with Richard H.L. Lawson, the frigate's second lieutenant. Sadly, the practitioners of the assertive masculinity of the dueling culture, with its concommitment to the preservation of honor, frequently paid the ultimate price for their prideful ways.[30]

After brief stops at Gibraltar and Malaga, Barron pressed on to the Barbary Coast and delivered the Algerian tribute. He next took the badly-leaking *New-York* to the Royal Navy base at Port Mahon for repairs. Decatur discovered that the oakum, which seals the ship's planking, had worked out of the seams in the bends and from the gun

28. Robert Smith to Barron, 13 August 1802, Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, vol. 5, RG 45, DNA; Secretary of State James Madison to James Leander Cathcart, 22 August 1802, Dispatches to Consuls, Record Group 84, Records of the Department of State, hereafter referred to as RG 84, DNA; Mary Lewis Cook and Charles Lee Lewis, "An American Naval Officer in the Mediterranean, 1802-07," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* 67 (November 1941): 1533-1535; J. Worth Estes, "Naval Medicine in the Age of Sail: The Voyage of the *New York*, 1802-1803," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 56 (1982), 241.

29. W.S. Osborn to Lieutenant Colonel Commandant William W. Burrows, U.S.M.C., 8 September 1802 (Captain Dudley W. Knox, U.S.N. [Ret.], ed., *Naval Documents Related to the United States Wars with the Barbary Powers*, 7 vols. [Washington: Government Printing Office, 1939-1945], 2:270), hereafter referred to as *NavDocs*. *BW;* James Barron to Robert Smith, 14 September 1802, DNA, Record Group 80, General Records of the Department of the Navy, 1798-1947, Miscellaneous Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy, hereafter referred to as RG 80, DNA.

30. Cook and Lewis, "An American Naval Officer," *Proceedings* 67:1534. Anne Pine Decatur married Lieutenant James McKnight, U.S.M.C., on 3 August 1795. McKnight received promotion to captain on 1 September 1798. The couple had a son and two daughters.

and spar decks. To add to the dilemma, two days after his hull survey, the first lieutenant found the foremast "badly Sprung in the Partners & unsafe to Proceed to Sea without being taken out and fished."[31]

The frigate left Port Mahon in mid-December and arrived at Malta on the 28th. The *John Adams* came in on 4 January 1803, and the *Chesapeake*, with Commodore Morris on board, arrived with the *Enterprize* the following day. Toward the end of the month Barron wrote to his brother: "I can't omit one piece of disagreeable information, namely the situation of Mr. Van Dyke, who was now laying momentarily expecting death to his relief from a most horrid wound which he received in a duel from Mr Osborn, Lieutenant of Marines. Two days will end his life, and all for the preference in a simple game of billiards." Morris called his captains together to plan the squadron's first foray against the forts at Tripoli. The American force sailed on the 30th, the same day Van Dyke died of his ghastly duelling wound. Morris's move against the Tripolitans was ill starred and ill timed; unable to hold position off the enemy port due to seasonal northerly gales, he opted to seek shelter at Malta. His ships straggled back to the British stronghold over 10 and 11 February. Last to arrive was the *New-York*. Once there, an incident occurred that almost ended Decatur's naval career. It was another one of those costly affairs of honor that decimated the early Navy's officer corps.[32]

The situation developed when Joseph Bainbridge, who had served under Decatur on board the *Norfolk*,[33] and several other *New-York* midshipmen went into Valetta on liberty. During an abrasive encounter with some Britons, Bainbridge and James Cochran (Acting Colonial Secretary under the Governor-General of Malta, Rear Admiral Sir Alexander J. Ball), swapped insults. It is not difficult to reconstruct the social tensions under which this Anglo-American confrontation took place. Commodore Morris had been in European waters since late May 1802, yet his squadron did not rendezvous to interdict the Tripolitan corsairs until January 1803, despite the fact that it was his primary mission in the Mediterranean Sea. The British were quite aware of Morris's dilatory proceedings. It can be imagined that the younger officers of the American squadron during their last liberty with their Royal Navy counterparts made some bellicose predictions—describing how they would crush the Barbary corsairs once they arrived off Tripoli. Ten days after their heralded departure, the U.S. Navy ships began creeping back into port, humbled by the weather without having fired a shot. When the American youngsters went ashore with their tails between their legs, reception from the British could have hardly been less than contemptuous, which would have quickly frayed Yankee tempers.

American accounts of the incident have generally placed young Bainbridge in the position of defending the honor of his country, and have perennially described Cochran as an expert duelist. Whatever the original provocation, Bainbridge pushed the Briton, thereby casting him into the role of the offended party. When Cochran's challenge arrived the next morning Decatur agreed to act as Bainbridge's "friend." A seconds' meeting took place and Decatur, with the advantage of representing the challenged party, chose pistols at *four* paces in the belief that this distance would best serve his principal's interest. So the vainglorious duelists took their stands at the lethal distance of about *eight* yards, instead of the customary *twenty*, and despite Cochran's purported expertise, both parties missed with their first shots. The brash young men had withstood the fire, thereby satisfying the code of honor; nevertheless, the seconds either could not or would not intervene. Decatur merely cautioned Bainbridge to lower his aim if he wished to live. In the next round of fire Cochran, the so-called "expert duelist," missed for the second time at that unnervingly close range, while Bainbridge's ball smashed the Briton's brow.

Admiral Ball demanded that Decatur and Bainbridge be turned over to the civil authorities to be tried for murder. Morris refused and ordered the squadron to set sail on the first fair wind that enabled him to exit the tricky Maltese harbor. He ordered his vessels to Tunis and Gibraltar on 19 February, where he intended to ship the American duelists back to the United States to protect them from Ball's wrath. Despite the commodore's good intentions, these orders outraged Decatur, who had come in search of glory—not to beat a hasty retreat from

31. Decatur to Barron, 25 and 27 November 1802, *NavDocs, BW*, 2:323 and 325. "Partners" refer to the pair of fore and aft timbers of heavy scantling that support the opening in each deck through which the masts pass to their seat. To "fish" is the operation of lashing ("woolding") two shaped pieces of wood, one on either side, of a weakened mast or spar as a temporary repair. "Sprung" refers to a crack or other fracture in a mast or spar. In the case of the *New-York* these cracks occurred because of the dried (resinless) state of the wood.

32. James Barron to Samuel Barron, 28 January 1803, James Barron Papers, Earl Gregg Swem Library, College of William and Mary; J. Worth Estes, M.D., "A Naval Surgeon in the Barbary Wars: Dr. Peter St. Medard on the *New York* 1802-03," in *New Aspects of Naval History: Selected Papers from the 5th Naval History Symposium* (Baltimore: The Nautical & Aviation Publishing Company, 1985), 82; Journal of James Leander Cathcart, 11 February 1803, Records of the Department of State, Consular Dispatches, Tripoli, Vol. 2, 1801-1805, RG 84, DNA.

33. Joseph Bainbridge served under Decatur on board *Norfolk, New-York, Chesapeake, Argus,* and *Enterprize*.

British officialdom. He threatened his resignation; but, thanks to "Barron's cooler counsel," reason prevailed: "Decatur did not resign and he was not in any way made to feel official displeasure."[34]

A still more bruising blow to Decatur's dignity awaited him at Gibraltar. A letter from the secretary of the navy directed Morris to send the *Chesapeake* to the United States, adding, "you will therefore, Sir, assume the command of either the *New York* or the *John Adams* and you will give the Command of the *Chesapeake* to the Captain whose Ship you may thus select." Morris took over the *New-York* with the majority of *Chesapeake*'s commissioned and warrant officers, including his first lieutenant, Isaac Chauncey, who was senior to Decatur. Morris's second lieutenant, John Smith, also senior to Decatur, chose to remain on board *Chesapeake* and return to the United States; therefore, no matter which ship Decatur chose, he stood to lose his position as first lieutenant. After four years of naval service, in addition to his naturally sensitive nature, he had come to share all the "sensitiveness of his fellow officers in regard to their dignities and perquisites," and threatened to resign, but again, "Barron talked to him like an elder brother, pointing out that such things were bound to happen in the Navy, and were in no way to be interpreted as a deliberate slight." Decatur acquiesced to his skipper's advice and took up his duties as the *Chesapeake*'s second lieutenant for the homeward voyage. Without Barron's counseling, Decatur, who had crashed headlong into the Navy's stonewall seniority system, might have abandoned the service to assuage his sense of honor.[35]

Barron held a low estimation of the *Chesapeake* and its Morris-trained crew, considering it "a much neglected and horribly disciplined ship"; regardless, with Smith and Decatur as his principal lieutenants, he set sail for America on April 7th. Two days before departure, when the ships exchanged officers, Barron's midshipmen addressed an encomium to him:

> Sir: Permit us to express to you our sincere and heartfelt regret at the change which is about to take place, and which removes you from your present command. We are well aware that we shall lose the benefits which were derived to us, both from your example and those lessons of instructions which you were so anxious to bestow upon us; for which, we beg leave to assure you our minds are deeply impressed with the most lively feelings of gratitude. . . . This is a short and feeble expression of what we feel on this occasion, but it is nonetheless perfectly sincere.

The tribute closed with the signatures of eleven midshipmen. Barron could justifiably sail home feeling that his contribution to the careers of these young gentlemen had guided their maturation process from callow youths to sea-going officers, and that he had saved a promising young leader for the navy in the person of Stephen Decatur. The *Chesapeake* returned to Washington Navy Yard on 26 May 1803, and the Decatur-Barron relationship entered a hiatus.[36]

Barron went home to Hampton to supervise the construction of one of two prototypes for President Thomas Jefferson's "Gunboat navy." The department undoubtedly valued Decatur's services, for he quickly received a new assignment—orders to take over as construction superintendent of the 18-gun brig *Argus* building in Boston, then to assume temporary command and deliver the vessel to Lieutenant Isaac Hull in the Mediterranean, whereupon Decatur would take over Hull's command. The secretary added, "as you have been almost constantly in service since you first entered it, you may probably wish to spend some time with your friends in Phila. This I cannot object to, and if you choose, you may remain there for two weeks, then proceed to Boston." Decatur then traveled home, where he visited with family and, presumably, his Philadelphia fiancée. In the end he took six weeks off, including travel time, and arrived in Boston on 9 July .[37]

Destiny awaited Decatur. During the following sixty days he saw the *Argus* through to completion and departed for Gibraltar. There, as ordered, he assumed com-

34. Cathcart Journal, 19 February 1803, RG 84, DNA; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 50. In both England and the United States, killing a person in a duel was legal murder, but in both countries public opinion overrode the law. Comparatively few duelists were ever brought to the bar of justice and, if the duel had been fairly fought, there was usually no conviction.

35. Richard V. Smith to Morris, 23 October 1802, *NavDocs, BW*, 2:306-307; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 50; Muster Roll of the United States Vessel of War *Chesapeake*, 1802-1803, Early History Branch, Naval Historical Center, U.S. Navy Department Library, Washington, D.C. Lieutenant Stephen Decatur appears as number 278.

36. James Barron to Samuel Barron, 28 January 1803, James Barron Papers; Log #227, kept on board the U.S. Frigate *John Adams* under the command of Captain John Rodgers by an unidentified person, 1802-1804, 7 April 1803, G.W. Blunt-White Library, Mystic Seaport Museum, Mystic, Connecticut; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 42-43. The midshipmen were Louis Alexis, Samuel Angus, William Butler, John Downes, Christopher Gadsden, Jr., Alexander Harrison, James S. Higginbotham, Archibald K. Kearney, William Lewis, Charles G. Ridgely, and Sidney Smith (Cook and Lewis, "An American Naval Officer," *Proceedings* 67:1535).

37. Smith to Decatur, 27 May 1803, Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, 1798-1868, RG 45, DNA; Decatur to Smith, 11 July 1803, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Commissioned Officers Below the Rank of Commander and from Warrant Officers, RG 45, DNA.

mand from Hull of the squadron's workhorse, the schooner *Enterprize*, and convoyed the storeship, *Traveler*, to Syracuse, Sicily, where Commodore Edward Preble established his headquarters. Midshipman Thomas Macdonough, of the frigate *Philadelphia*, had been at Gibraltar in charge of one of its prizes when the Tripolitans captured his own ship. Preble transferred him to the *Enterprize* at the beginning of December 1803 and, thereafter, discussion of the *Philadelphia*'s plight became a pressing topic among the afterguard of Decatur's command. Syracuse provided an unhappy experience for Decatur when the conduct of the *Enterprize*'s crew on shore drew Preble's wrath soon after the commodore arrived at the ancient Sicilian port:

> Sir Your men on shore for the purpose of fitting your Rigging, were this Afternoon most of them drunk,—This must undoubtedly have happened in consequence of the negligence of the Officers in charge of them, I request you to make the necessary inquiry respecting this Neglect on their part, as I shall most certainly take notice of it,—One of your men is in Irons on board this ship. For impertinence to me.

Two weeks later, dutifully sailing in company with *Constitution*, *Enterprize* departed for the coast of Tripoli, where Preble not only displayed the flag, but reconnoitered the position of the *Philadelphia*. On 23 December they fell in with and captured the Tripolitan ketch *Mastico*. Preble purchased the prize into the navy, and a plan to burn the captured frigate may have begun to form. Meanwhile, more trouble with the commodore awaited Decatur. He and Macdonough, while ashore in Syracuse during January, became involved in an incident that led to the death of a local thug. And for the third time in his young life the possibility of civilian murder charges threatened Decatur.

> It is related that while the squadron was at Syracuse the officers and men were often set upon by ruffians and that on one occasion Decatur and Midshipman Macdonough, while passing down one of the streets of the city at night, were attacked by three men. Drawing their swords, they defended themselves so successfully that the men were driven off, and Macdonough pursued one of them to the top of a house, from which the man jumped to the ground and perished from the fall.

A month later, after regaining the commodore's good graces, Decatur received command of the captured *Mastico*, now renamed *Intrepid*, on an expedition to penetrate Tripoli harbor and destroy the *Philadelphia*. He succeeded beyond expectations. No less a personage than Vice Admiral Horatio Lord Nelson described the action as "the most bold and daring act of the age." As a result, Decatur became a national hero, and received promotion to the Navy's highest rank, jumping over the seven lieutenants who ranked him. Within six months, however, the cruel death of Richard Somers on board the same *Intrepid* diminished Decatur's pride in accomplishment. His devotion to his friends was legendary, and both he and Charles Stewart deeply mourned the loss of their boyhood companion, who literally died before their eyes.[38]

In the autumn of 1804 Decatur briefly took command of the *Constitution* from Preble, but a senior captain, John Rodgers, forced an exchange that left Decatur in charge of the smaller *Congress*. The young captain commanded the 38-gun *Congress* for a year, and brought it home to Hampton Roads on 5 November 1805, with the Tunisian ambassador to the United States and his entourage as passengers.[39]

Decatur had sailed to the Mediterranean as lieutenant in temporary command of a gun-brig, and returned two years later as the youngest captain in the history of the U.S. Navy, and in command of a frigate. One of the first people to welcome Decatur was James Barron, who came on board to greet him after the *Congress* arrived in Hampton Roads. Barron had been appointed to supervise the construction of a 74-gun ship-of-the-line at Norfolk two months earlier. The Virginian stayed to dine, and Decatur subsequently went to Barron's home for supper. Years later, during the bitter correspondence that prefaced their fatal duel, Decatur wrote: "The only time I recollect being at your house was on my arrival from the Mediterranean, in the *Congress* fourteen years past. You came on board, and dined with me, and invited the Tunisian Ambassador and myself to spend the evening with you at Hampton. I accepted your invitation." Respect and friendship set the tenor on this occasion. Decatur, whose naval career had been advanced by Barron, was now his equal in rank, if not in seniority, and no one expressed more satisfaction at this situation than Barron himself.[40]

38. Edward Preble to Decatur, 1 December 1803, Getchell Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia (Lillie Shippen Getchell was Decatur's great-grand niece); address, Assistant Secretary of the Navy Charles H. Darling to the Historical Society of Vermont, 27 October 1904, quoted in Charles G. Muller, *The Proudest Day: Macdonough on Lake Champlain* (New York: John Day Company, 1960), 338; Mackenzie, *Decatur*, 81. The rank of master commandant was not in use between 3 March 1801 and 19 May 1804. The lieutenants senior to Decatur were in order: Charles Stewart, Isaac Hull, Andrew Sterett, John Shaw, Isaac Chauncey, John Smith, and Richard Somers.

39. Louis F. Middlebrook, ed., *Journal of Hezekiah Loomis Steward on the U.S. Brig "VIXEN," Captain John Smith, U.S.N.* (Salem, Massachusetts: Essex Institute, 1928), 61.

40. Other young captains include Nicholas Biddle, who became a one in the Continental Navy at age twenty-five in 1775, and Joshua Barney who received a captaincy in the Pennsylvania State Navy to command the *Hyder Ali* at age twenty-two. Smith to James Barron, 20 September 1805, James Barron Papers; Decatur to Barron, 29 December 1819, *Correspondence Between Decatur and Barron*.

While at Hampton Roads Decatur met, was charmed by, and fell deeply in love with one of the most eligible young women in the United States, Susan Wheeler, daughter of the Mayor of Norfolk. She had already rejected the advances of Vice President Aaron Burr, and Jerôme Bonaparte, brother of the Emperor of France. Susan had seen a miniature of Decatur when she visited *Congress* during his absence the day before they met:

An incident happened while the *Congress* frigate was at anchor in Hampton Roads, which may be properly mentioned in this place. A schooner, returning to Norfolk with a sailing party, anchored near the frigate. Some of the party desired to visit the Tunisian Ambassador, and the African curiosities, which he was bringing as a present from the Bey. Neither Decatur nor the Ambassador was on board; the ladies examined the curiosities, and reposed in the cabin. Nothing interested them more, than a highly finished Italian miniature of the youthful and handsome captain. The father of Miss Wheeler, who was of the party, was Mayor of Norfolk.

Their first face-to-face meeting took place in the city of Norfolk at a reception for the Tunisian on 17 November:

On the following day, Decatur came, with the Tunisian, to make him [the Mayor] a visit of ceremony. They dined with the Mayor, and the society of Norfolk were assembled, in the evening, at a ball, to honor the visitors. Decatur was at once attracted by the mingled beauty, grace, and elegance of his host's daughter; nor was the lady backward in discovering, that the Italian artist had done even less than justice to the attractions of the young hero. It is believed that the spark of love was already kindled at that moment in the bosoms of both, only to be extinguished by death. In a subsequent part of the narrative, Decatur's being assigned to the Norfolk station may be fairly attributed to the attraction of the Mayor's daughter.[41]

Despite Decatur's betrothed state, the couple engaged in a whirlwind romance. Decatur tore himself away from Susan on the 23rd to take the *Congress* up to Washington, where he arrived on the 30th to a hero's welcome.[42] There is no record of how he broke his engagement to his Philadelphia fiancée, but MissWheeler remained constantly in mind. Aware of her musical talents, which were celebrated in the social circles of Washington, Baltimore, and Norfolk, Decatur entrusted his friend, Master Commandant Isaac Chauncey, now in command of the new brig *Hornet*, to deliver a gift of sheet music to her. His letter to Decatur of 24 December 1805, reporting the completion of his mission, is a delight:

Sir . . . the commission that you honored me with for Miss W. I delivered into her own hands, She blushing received the Music and with looks that expressed the feelings of her Soul thanked me as the Bearer but more particularly, the Donor for not forgetting her—She asked me to call the following day, I did so, and found the little packet had wrought mericles [*sic*], it indeed had been Music to her Soul, for Joy beemed [*sic*] in her Eyes and her every gesture was heavenly—and I may adopt the language that Milton has put in the Mouth of Adam "Grace was in all her Steps, Heaven in her Eye, in every gesture dignity and love" She was extremely cautious and circumspect in all her inquiries She however cou'd not help saying that she had heard that you was to be married on your arrival in Philadelphia, that the Sword presented to you by a voat [*sic*] of Congress had been sent to Miss ____ of that place for safe keeping, that you wou'd be obliged to Marry the Lady to save the Sword, I told her that the World was generally liberal with what did not belong to them, that report frequently disposed of single Gentlemen and Ladies without asking their consent, and that it was with you as many others, that report had been premature in that particular for I did not believe you had an Idea of marrying any person in Philadelphia, that I knew as far as related to the Sword was not true, for to my knowledge it was forwarded to your father. She however I thought appeared a little Jealous—at any rate my dear fellow you will return this Winter and act your part well, if I mistake not (to make another Quotation from Milton you may say with Adam) "To the Nuptial Bed I led her blushing like the Morn all Heaven and happy Constellations on that hour shed their choicest influence" Where I shall leave you my dear friend to make the best use of your time.

Decatur did not answer Chauncey's letter, perhaps because the latter's open discussion with Susan Wheeler about the Philadelphia liaison dismayed him. As for Susan's jealousy, it might have been feigned—the coquettishness of the Southern belle, the teasing of a Circe—subtly manipulating a strong, virile, obviously beguiled Ulysses, so willing a victim of her copious charms. She was three years his senior in age, but with more than a decade of mingling at the heights of American society behind her, was vastly more experienced in life ashore than her sailor suitor.[43]

Chauncey's reassurance to Susan of Decatur's love no doubt left the smitten hero free to enjoy his popularity at Philadelphia banquets given in his honor on 2 and 7 January. Toward the end of the month, he finally broke loose from his family and friends and rushed back to

41. Mary-Jo Kline, ed., *Political Correspondence and Public Papers of Aaron Burr* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 2:552; Eugene L. Didier, *The Life and Letters of Madame Bonaparte* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1879), 28; Desmond Seward, *Napoleon's Family, The Notorious Bonapartes and Their Ascent to the Thrones of Europe* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1986), 62; MacKenzie, *Life of Decatur*, 134.

42. Middlebrook, Loomis Journal, 62.

43. Isaac Chauncey Papers, New-York Historical Society. Chauncey wrote to Decatur on 20 March 1806 congratulating him on his wedding to Susan Wheeler, and indicating that Decatur had not replied to his letter of 24 December 1805. Henry P. Silka discovered both documents through his own research, and my thanks go to him for so generously sharing them.

Norfolk. During his visit there happenstance initiated the events and emotions that led to the disruption of his seven-year relationship with Barron:

> Decatur and James Barron met on a street, accompanied by some of their friends. As they paused to chat, one of the group asked Decatur teasingly if there were not some 'particular attraction' which drew him to Norfolk. James felt the jesting was inappropriate because Decatur had told him of his engagement to a girl in Philadelphia, and the fact was generally known both in Philadelphia and among the officers on the Mediterranean station. So Barron quietly hinted that Decatur's affections were already centered on someone elsewhere. Evidently this offended Decatur beyond measure, although Samuel assured his brother that there was nothing in the remark that, under the circumstances, should have given offense. The fact was, that at the time Decatur had already made up his mind to discard his Philadelphia sweetheart for Miss Susan Wheeler of Norfolk, and he wanted no one in Norfolk to know of his previous engagement. Of course neither of the Barrons was aware of this.[44]

In light of Decatur's rigid sense of honor, Barron's allusion to the presence of a prior marital commitment likely mortified him. Betrothals were not lightly regarded in those days.

On the other side of the Atlantic, rumors incited a serious dispute between James Barron and a fellow captain in the Navy, John Rodgers:

> In May while Rodgers was at Gibraltar preparing to return home with his fleet, he was informed by the officer of the brig *Hornet*, which vessel had recently arrived in the Mediterranean, that various slanders injurious to his reputation were being circulated in America. The commodore was satisfied that the prime instigator of this personal abuse was Captain [James] Barron. He seems also to have connected the captain with a malicious libel that appeared in the public prints about this time.[45]

Rodgers' enmity germinated from his belief that James Barron had insisted his brother Samuel hold onto the Mediterranean command in 1805, instead of turning it over to Rodgers, when the elder Barron was almost disabled by illness. Rodgers' specious stance goaded the younger Barron into the only clear challenge he ever offered to the field. Captain William Bainbridge described it:

> The Morning we sailed I delivered to Com Rogers the following message from Captn. Barron— "That he had heard that he had spoken in a disrespectfull manner of his brother's character, for which aspersion he should call on him to answer in a proper place and time and that Commodore Barrons illness prevented him from doing so immediately.[46]

44. Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 57-58.
45. Paullin, *Rodgers*, 176.
46. Bainbridge to David Porter, written on board the *President* off Malta, 10 July 1805, *NavDocs, BW*, 6:174.

Barron had sailed from the Mediterranean in command of the *President*, carrying home a mixed-bag of passengers, including his ailing brother, the recently released Bainbridge, and the majority of the *Philadelphia* captives. As soon as Rodgers followed Barron home to America the following year, he sent notice that he was ready to take the field to defend his insulted integrity:

> From an honorable motive I am induced to acquaint you that I have at length arrived in America. I am now on passage to Washington, and as it is full likely that I shall not remain many weeks in the United States, in justice to your reputation, I take this method to inform you that I shall hold myself ready to account to you at any time from the present immediate epoch to the same date of the ensuing month.

When the missive arrived at Barron's home, it was not unexpected. Rodgers apparently expected to fight not only Barron, but several senior members of the officer corps: "I therefore must request that you will not delay, as I consider myself bound by honor to answer to your demands before I can make any positive engagements with any other persons who may have similar claims." Seven months of delay, partly due to one of Barron's bouts with the ague, but also through the time-buying tactics of the seconds, Captain Thomas Tingey, U.S.N., for Rodgers, and Lieutenant Colonel Franklin Wharton, the Marine Corps commandant, for Barron, defused the issue. Despite his blustering, "Rodgers, who oftened threatened to fight duels—and who just as many times backed off from so doing," remained true to his pacific pattern. One senior officer, however, expressed dissatisfaction with the peaceful outcome—Stephen Decatur.[47] His distaste for the resolution of the Barron-Rodgers affair probably added to the offense he may have taken to Barron's reference to his Philadelphia romance. All of this may have caused the ruin of a personal friendship and a respectful professional association, especially after the Reverend Benjamin Porter Grigsby, pastor of Norfolk's Presbyterian congregation, married Stephen Decatur and Susan Wheeler on 8 March 1806.[48]

Barron acquired an avenging angel. Decatur became

47. Paullin, Rodgers, 177; Christopher McKee, "The Pathology of a Profession: Death in the United States Navy Officer Corps, 1797-1815," *War & Society* 3 (May 1985), 1:12; Stevens, *An Affair of Honor*, 57.
48. George Holbert Tucker, Compiler, *Abstracts from Norfolk City Marriage Bonds (1797-1850) and Other Genealogical Data* (Norfolk, Va.: William H. Delaney, Printer and Publisher, 1934), 28. The irony has recently come to light through the research of Leonard F. Guttridge that James Barron and Stephen Decatur may have been distant relatives through marriage. Barron's wife was an Armistead, and Susan Wheeler Decatur's cousin, John Newton Williams, a prominent citizen of Norfolk who lived with the Wheelers in his youth, also married an Armistead, (Letter, Leonard F. Guttridge to the author, 24 August 1990).

relentless in his drive to discredit his former friend from then on until he died from Barron's bullet on 22 March 1820. Rarely in the naval profession has a senior officer been so pursued by a junior colleague. While the Norfolk embarrassment may have implanted the animosity within Decatur, two later events—the *Chesapeake-Leopard* affair and Barron's non-appearance during the War of 1812—inflamed it to white heat in his heart. The original source of Decatur's animus can only be speculated upon, but the psychological aspect of the father figure, be it Stephen Decatur, Sr., or James Barron, may offer the most fertile ground for a psycho-historic study.

Decatur's first opportunity to damage Barron came the year after the street meeting in Norfolk. On 21 June 1807, the Virginian departed Hampton Roads in the *Chesapeake* with Master Commandant Charles Gordon as his flag captain to take command of the Mediterranean Station. The frigate was still in sight of the Capes when it was hailed by the British 50-gun ship *Leopard*. After being refused permission to board and search the *Chesapeake* for deserters, the *Leopard* fired three broadsides at the unprepared American. Barron brought the crippled flagship back into Norfolk. Decatur was a daily spectator at Barron's court of inquiry, which was presided over by none other than Captain Alexander Murray, whose refitting of the lost *Insurgent* Barron had criticized. Decatur sat, absorbing every word against his former friend, without so much as a sympathetic glance. In his own words: "I was present at the court of inquiry upon you, and heard the evidence that adduced for and against you; thence I drew an opinion altogether unfavorable to you." To Decatur's credit, he cited this prejudice, and asked to be relieved from sitting on Barron's court martial: "During the Court of Inquiry, I was present when the evidence of the officers was given. I have since seen the opinion of the Court, which I think lenient." But, when the secretary refused his request, he offered no further resistance.[49]

A clearly antagonistic John Rodgers, who once said to Bainbridge, "tell [Barron] that if I do not hear from him I shall impute it to a want in him of—what no gentleman who wears a uniform should be deficient in," directed the court martial proceedings. Decatur openly assumed his role of avenging angel at the trial: "Decatur was an outspoken critic of Barron's actions. . . . The result was what is now considered an obvious case of scape-goating. Even after the trial . . . he used his power and prestige to continue to bait and goad Barron."[50]

This offensive attitude remained unchanged until he and Barron stood on the field of honor at Bladensburg. Facing each other with pistols loaded and ready, they realized the enormity of their predicament and common sense rose to the surface for the first time in thirteen years. As they parted to take their positions, Barron made the first overture when he expressed the hope to Decatur that "on meeting in another world, they would be better friends than in this."

Decatur replied, "I have never been your enemy, sir."[51]

But their seconds ignored this opportunity to bring about a rapprochement and called the commodores to arms, immediately beginning the ritualistic sequence. At the utterance of "one" both officers fired so precisely together that only a single report was heard.

49. Decatur to Barron, 31 October 1819, *Correspondence Between Decatur and Barron;* Decatur to Smith, 17 December 1807, Letters Received by the Secretary of the Navy from Captains, M125, roll 9, R.G. 45, DNA.

50. Smith to Decatur, 26 December 1807, Letters Sent by the Secretary of the Navy to Officers, M149, roll 7, RG 45, DNA; Thomas Truxtun, once supportive of Rodgers, wrote to Charles Biddle of Philadelphia in June 1811: "I have long since lost all opinion of Rodgers, *and he knows it*—he is a trifler and a sycophant—such men I despise *and I despise Rodgers*—have done much for him and made him what he is—and he has said—but for me—my discipline & counsel, he would never have risen above a master of a common merchantman." (Palmer, *Stoddert's War*, 195); Bainbridge to Porter, 10 July 1805, *NavDocs, BW*, 6:174; *Proceedings of the General Court Martial Convened for the Trial of Commodore James Barron, Captain Charles Gordon, Mr. William Hook, and Captain John Hall, of the United States' Ship CHESAPEAKE. In the Month of January 1808* (Washington: Jacob Gideon, Junior, 1822); James Valle, *Rocks and Shoals* (Annapolis: Naval Institute Press: 1980), 148. Professor Valle also mentions Jay D. Smith, "Commodore James Barron: Guilty as Charged?," *United States Naval Institute Proceedings* 93 (November 1967): 340-376.

51. Don C. Seitz, *Famous American Duels* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1929), 224; Paullin, "Duelling in the Old Navy," U.S. Naval Institute *Proceedings* (1909): 4:1178-1184.

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The *Panay* Revisited: A Maritime Perspective

DAVID H. GROVER

OFTEN identified as the prelude to World War II in the Pacific, the *Panay* incident of 1937, an attack on a U.S. Navy gunboat by Japanese aircraft, is commonly regarded as a significant event in military history.[1] Indeed, the incident did include such an action, but often overlooked in the retelling of the story is the fact that three American merchant ships, all larger than the *Panay*, and a number of smaller vessels were also destroyed in the same attack. To provide a convenient reference for newsmen and historians the events of December 12, 1937, in the Yangtze River above Nanking have been called the *Panay* incident, but it would have been more appropriate to designate the events as the *Panay* convoy incident.

True, most accounts of the incident acknowledge the loss of the three Socony-Vacuum Oil Company ships, the *Mei Ping*, *Mei Hsia*, and *Mei An*, during the attack on the convoy. But only rarely does the suggestion occur that these merchant ships may well have been both the principal targets and principal victims of the attack. The loss of two *Panay* crewmen and one Italian journalist aboard that ship is commonly acknowledged in accounts of the attack; less frequently noted is the death of the American captain of the *Mei An*, and scarcely ever mentioned is the loss of several dozen Chinese crewmen of the Socony ships. Perhaps as we approach the 50th anniversary of the start of the war in the Pacific it would be an appropriate time to examine this so-called prelude to war, and to establish properly the maritime—as opposed to military—aspects of the events.

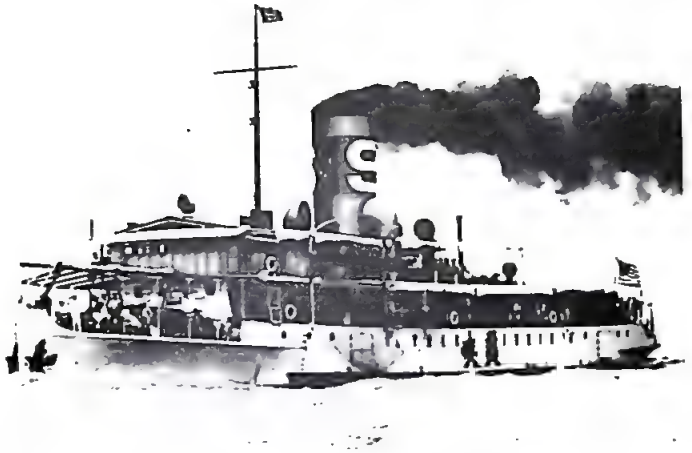
A brief look at how these American merchant ships came to be in China may be useful at the outset. Socony-Vacuum and its predecessor, Standard Oil of New York, had been in China since the turn of the century, even before the 1911 breakup of the giant parent, Standard Oil Company.[2] Socony's first ship, the 236-foot steamer *Mei An*, had gone into service on the lower Yangtze River in 1901. The flagship *Mei Foo*, bearing the name that was the company's official chop in China, followed in 1912.[3] During the 1920s the company had operated half a dozen steamships, a dozen or so motorships, and many small launches, barges, and other craft. The more powerful of these vessels went up the Yangtze as far as Chungking, 1,400 miles from the sea, and up several major tributaries as well, including the Han River northwest of Hankow and the Siang River south to Changsha and beyond. Major marine terminals existed at a number of cities including the deepwater ports of Nanking, scene of the famous Socony Hill incident in 1927, and Hankow.

Kerosene was the primary product carried by Socony's fleet, the "Oil for the Lamps of China" made famous as the title of the best-selling novel of the early 1930s by

1. The concept of *prelude* is central in each of the basic book-length accounts of the *Panay* incident. See Manny T. Koginos, *The Panay Incident, Prelude to War*. Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1967; and Hamilton Darby Perry, *The Panay Incident, Prelude to Pearl Harbor*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1969. For article-length treatment see H. J. Swanson, "The Panay Incident, Prelude to Pearl Harbor," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, December, 1967.

2. Considerable confusion exists because the oil company operated under four different names during its forty years on the Yangtze: Standard Oil Company until 1911, Standard Oil Company of New York (commonly called Socony) until 1931, Socony-Vacuum Oil Company until 1933, and Standard-Vacuum Oil Company, a joint venture with Standard Oil of New Jersey, after 1933. For simplicity the more familiar names, Socony and Socony-Vacuum, will be used in this account, even though Standard-Vacuum was the official name of the operator of the Yangtze River fleet in 1937.

3. For an account of Standard Oil's presence in China see Irvine H. Anderson, Jr., *The Standard-Vacuum Oil Company and United States East Asian Policy, 1933-1941*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975; Gerald T. White, *Formative Years in the Far West, A History of Standard Oil Company of California and Predecessors Through 1919*. New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962; Richard O'Connor, *The Oil Barons, Men of Greed and Grandeur*. Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1971; and Chu-Yuan Cheng, "The United States Petroleum Trade with China, 1876-1949," in Ernest R. May and John H. Fairbank, editors, *America's China Trade in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986.



A handsome ship looking much like a Yangtze gunboat, the *Mei Hsia* tried to help the *Panay* during the attack, but naval officers feared her flammable cargo. (Mobil Corporation)

Alice Tisdale Hobart, wife of the Socony manager at Nanking who had been the hostess—as well as one of the escapees—in the Socony Hill siege.[4] Because most kerosene was shipped in 5-gallon cans, the Socony ships often functioned as dry-cargo vessels, although a few of them were fitted with tanks for bulk carriage of petroleum products.

Socony was not the only operator of product ships on the river. Asiatic Petroleum, an affiliate of Royal Dutch, also had a fleet of tankers. Nor was Socony the only American company on the river. Robert Dollar operated two passenger-cargo ships in the early 1920s, but gave up the service after serious incidents to both ships in 1924.[5] The other American-flag fleet consisting of as many as a dozen ships belonged to Yangtze Rapid Steamship Company, a swashbuckling outfit with an unsavory reputation with the U.S. Navy and State Department.[6]

Ships of many other nations were also engaged in commerce on the Yangtze. The so-called "unequal treaties" had opened the interior of China to trade on a most-favored-nation basis; furthermore, the concept of extra-territoriality provided that the ships of any nation trading on the river were subject to the laws of that nation, not to those of China, and the gunboats of the foreign nation could be used to protect its merchant vessels. During most of the four decades of American shipping on the Yangtze the new Chinese nation was beset with civil strife including the revolution of 1911, the resulting contention between war lords, the consolidation of Nationalist power under Chiang Kai-shek in the 1920s, the disruptions by the Communists in the early 1930s, and the incursions of the Japanese during the 1930s leading to the Sino-Japanese War in 1937.

The "open door" policy of the United States supported China's independence, but called for neutrality in the country's internal disputes while looking ahead to the stability that could eventually lead to the end of extraterritoriality. However, other policies of the Departments of Commerce and State encouraged American companies to continue to operate ships in the interior of China. It was a complex and frustrating milieu for American diplomats, naval officers, and merchant mariners, as well as for corporations doing business in China, regardless of their degree of social responsibility.

The Yangtze itself added to the complexity of trading in China. The navigable portion of the great river was made up of three distinct sections. The first 600 miles from the ocean to Hankow could be transited by seagoing vessels of all but the largest size. The next 400 miles, the middle river from Hankow to Ichang, was open to river vessels of all types, at least in summer when water levels were high. The upper river from Ichang to Chungking, the 350-mile stretch containing the spectacular gorges of the Yangtze, presented a variety of hazards including wild rapids with intense current, unpredictable eddies, and widely fluctuating water levels. Only a few ships specially built for this service could handle the unique challenge of this stretch of river.

Such vessels were generally built with well-compartmentalized steel hulls to counter flooding, twin tunnel-housed screws and multiple rudders for maneuverability, and engines powerful enough to produce 15 knots of speed to overcome the velocity of the current. Either reciprocating steam plants or diesel or kerosene-burning internal combustion engines powered these small ships.

Other design features of Yangtze vessels reflected the human environment of the river which was as dangerous as was the physical environment. To protect the captain,

4. The Socony Hill incident is described in a number of sources. For a Navy perspective see Kemp Tolley, *Yangtze Patrol, The U.S. Navy in China*. Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 1971; Roger Pineau, "USS *Noa* and the Fall of Nanking," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, November, 1955; Roy C. Smith, Jr., "Nanking, 24 March 1927," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, January, 1928; Bernard D. Cole, *Gunboats and Marines, The United States Navy in China*, 1925-28. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1983. For a colorful eyewitness account see Alice Tisdale Hobart, *Within the Walls of Nanking*. London: Butler and Tanner, 1928.

5. Robert Dollar, *Memoirs of Robert Dollar*. San Francisco: Robert Dollar, 1925.

6. Frederick B. Hoyt, "The Open Door Leads to Reluctant Intervention: The Case of the Yangtze Rapid Steamship Company," *Diplomatic History*, v. 2, Summer, 1977.

pilot, and helmsman from gunfire coming from roving bandits and the armies of war lords stalking the riverbank, bullet-proof armor was placed around the bridge of each vessel. Similarly, to discourage passengers from acts of piracy the bridge was surrounded by sharp steel spikes. With banditry, looting, and opium smuggling rampant on the river at times, it was difficult for foreign ships to avoid being caught in the crossfire, literally as well as figuratively, between rival groups vying for control of the river.

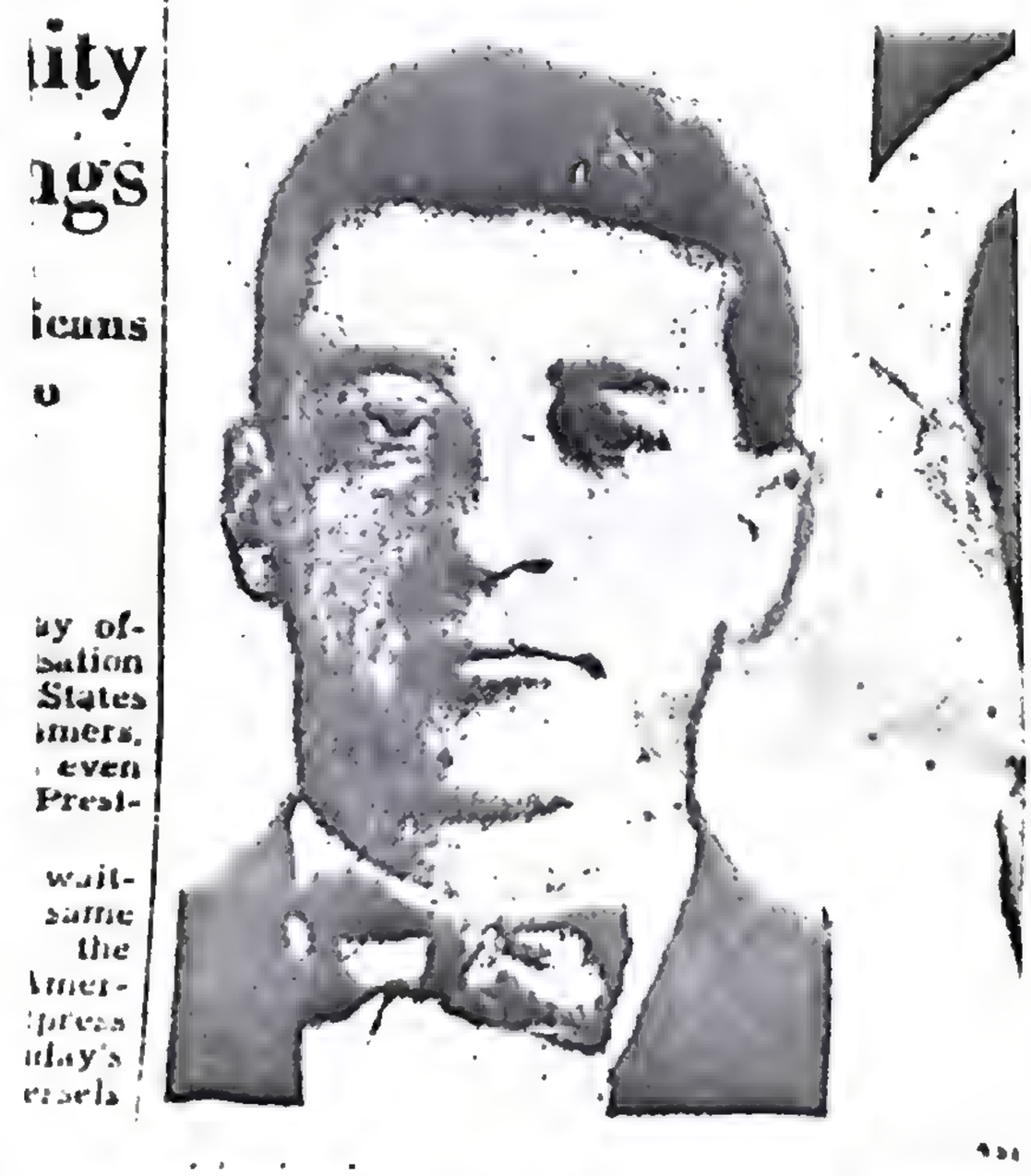
Most of the acts of lawlessness along the banks were committed against dry-cargo ships rather than the Socony ships because the former were more apt to be involved, knowingly or unknowingly, in opium trafficking or in direct competition for cargo with the junkmen's guild which resented their presence on the river. Nevertheless, Socony had its share of hostile encounters with brigands. Many of its vessels were fired upon at various locations on the middle and upper river, and the *Mei Hung* even had to be towed by the Navy tug *Pigeon* out of the grasp of a hundred soldiers who had commandeered her. But in spite of the hostile human and physical environment, Socony lost none of its ships to the normal perils of the Yangtze during forty years of operation on the river, while Dollar lost one in five years and Yangtze Rapid two in ten years.

Naval protection to American ships on the Yangtze was provided in two ways, either through the convoying of ships with gunboats or by placing aboard individual merchant ships an armed guard crew of a half dozen sailors or marines. There is some evidence to suggest that the latter procedure actually precipitated more gunfire from bandits and troops ashore than the ships could expect without such protection.[7]

The captains of Yangtze River vessels were a singularly lonely breed. Generally the only Caucasians on board except for an occasional armed guard crew, they were dependent on Chinese intermediaries who supervised the work of the deck force and the black gang. Most captains were also dependent on non-English-speaking pilots for navigation in the difficult sections of the river, although the Socony captains frequently functioned as their own pilots. The American dry-cargo companies generally hired only American captains, but Socony used Europeans as well as Americans as skippers.

Socony-Vacuum maintained an unusually close relationship with the U.S. Navy and State Department. As the most prominent American firm doing business in central China it was often the beneficiary of such a relationship, but it sometimes made positive contributions to it as well in carrying out broad national policy objectives. In 1929 the Commander of the Asiatic Fleet, Admiral Charles L. McVay, Jr., charged American naval forces in China with four tasks: protecting American lives, protecting American property, promoting American interests, and cultivating friendly relations with the Chinese.[8] Socony vessels frequently were in a position to further these national objectives, particularly in the protection of lives and property.

For example, in 1929 the Socony vessel *Mei Tan* rescued the disabled and out-of-control American gunboat *Palos*



This picture of Captain Carl H. Carlson, copied from a wirephoto clipped from a 1937 newspaper, shows how the Socony captain looked before his death aboard the S.S. *Mei An* in the *Panay* convoy attack. (Washington *Post*)

7. *New York Times*, March 11, 1931, by-lined story by Hallett Abend, quoted in Naval Institute Proceedings, 1931, p. 701.

8. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1929*, v. II. Washington: Government Printing Office, pp. 475-476.

A dive bomber crossing astern of the *Panay* has come from the direction of the *Mei An* which was knocked out of commission early in the attack. (Naval Imaging Command)

from a dangerous stretch of river in the gorges and towed her to safety.[9] In 1927 the Socony Hill compound at Nanking served as a refuge for Americans when the consulate in that city was overrun by Chinese troops. Emergency plans of the American-European communities at major cities along the Yangtze often contained provision for the use of Socony facilities as refuges or assembly points.[10] Naval vessels frequently used Socony anchorages or piers. Socony ships were utilized from time to time in evacuating westerners to safety from such isolated locations as Chungking or Changsha.[11]

Even more direct involvement with the Navy took place when Socony ships moved landing forces to areas where they were needed, transported American military and consular officials, provided company pilots to naval vessels, and showed the flag in many locations without provoking the kind of ill will stirred up by the abrasive Yangtze Rapid Company. Socony even carried out a rest and rehabilitation function for the Navy by providing clubs and canteens ashore and on its vessels where sailors could enjoy a beer and other recreation not available on the crowded gunboats.

In addition, some Socony personnel had direct links with the Navy. Captain Carl H. Carlson, who died on the *Mei An* in the *Panay* convoy incident, had been a lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve, a pilot on the river, and spoke Chinese.[12] Such a person could be very useful to Naval Intelligence.

In a very real sense Socony often functioned as an extension of American foreign policy in China. Many American citizens at home objected to this close and cozy relationship even before the *Panay* convoy incident occurred; considerably more objected to it afterward. Indeed, the Gallup Poll was soon to discover that early in 1938 about 70% of Americans wanted all their countrymen to get out of China.[13]

Against this broad backdrop of the socio-economic and geopolitical conditions prevailing for American ships on the Yangtze in December, 1937, the ship captains of Socony-Vacuum encountered specific circumstances which were far more hazardous than anything they had known previously. Japanese forces were hammering away at Nanking which had been the capital of China until a few days earlier when Chiang Kai-shek had fled to Hankow before his retreat to Chungking. The brutal assault, which would ultimately kill an estimated 200,000 Chinese, would soon come to be known as the "Rape of Nanking." Westerners were fleeing for their safety to the gunboats and merchant ships of their respective countries. For Americans this meant the USS *Panay* and the river vessels of Socony-Vacuum.

The mass riverborne exodus from Nanking reached its peak on December 11, 1937. Foreign warships and merchantmen with evacuees already on board were anchored off the upstream end of the city wall, some three and a

9. Glenn Howell, "Chungking to Ichang," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, September, 1938, pp. 1312-1316.

10. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1930, v. II. Washington: Government Printing Office, p. 118.

11. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1926, v. II. Washington: Government Printing Office, p. 639.

12. This information was supplied by Charles P. Tocchio, a friend of Captain Carlson, in the Waterbury (CT) *Republican*, December 15, 1937, p. 1.

13. David H. Grover, *Captives of Shanghai, The Story of the President Harrison*. Napa, CA: Western Maritime Press, 1989, p. 9.

half miles above the customs house. The Socony-Vacuum fleet was the largest group of vessels; in addition to the three ships that were larger than the *Panay*, there were two smaller motor tankers, the *Mei Yi* and *Mei Ying*, the bulk freighter #206, three bulk junks, three chartered junks, two motor launches, and four sampans.[14] Together these vessels accommodated more than 800 passengers, mostly Chinese employees of the firm and their families, plus a few American evacuees, all but one of whom were Socony employees.

Aboard the *Panay* were about a dozen evacuees, largely State Department and news media personnel. Also present in the harbor with their own evacuees were several British merchant ships of Asiatic Petroleum and Butterfield & Swire, including the *Wantung* of the latter company which had once been the American-flag *Alice Dollar*. Two British gunboats were also present.

At about two p.m. on the 11th shells began to land close to the Socony vessels. This gunfire led the captains to weigh anchor and shift to another anchorage a mile upstream. There, after a few minutes, shells again began to land close aboard, so all the American and British ships in port weighed anchor and moved slowly upriver, finally anchoring at about five p.m. one mile above the Heashan Bluff beacon. This must have been an impressive international armada; perhaps as many as twelve of these vessels could be called ships in the ordinary sense, and there were even more of the smaller craft.

On the following morning the captain of the *Panay*, Lcdr. James J. Hughes, USN, observing the resumption of shelling nearby, directed the American ships to get underway upriver again. About twenty miles above Nanking the convoy was stopped by a launch full of Japanese soldiers who wanted to inspect the *Panay* and the other ships to make sure they carried no Chinese soldiers escaping from Nanking. Lcdr. Hughes demurred, eased the soldiers off his ship as diplomatically as he could, and resumed the trip upriver.[15]

At a point about 27 miles above Nanking and near mile 221 from the mouth of the Yangtze, Hughes anchored the *Panay* and the convoy at about 11:30 a.m. in a wide reach lying between islands both upstream and down. At this point the river runs north-northeastward. With the ships headed upstream, the left or north bank lay to the northwest, a low swampy area full of heavy stands of reeds. On the opposite bank to the southeast was firmer, gently-rising land; a small landing there was called Manashan.

The *Panay* was in the center of the cluster of anchored ships. The *Mei Hsia* was ahead of her some 200 yards, the *Mei Ping* was 150 yards off her starboard bow, and the *Mei An* was about 300 yards astern and slightly to starboard of the gunboat. Each of the Socony tankers had several smaller craft made fast to her, although most Navy accounts of the scene have made no reference to these additional vessels.

The *Mei Ping* served as the host Socony vessel. Not only was she the only one of the tankers with Caucasian evacuees aboard, but she soon opened up her canteen to the Navy men and passengers on the *Panay* who wanted to enjoy a beer after Sunday dinner. A launch shuttled between the gunboat and the tanker, much as a liberty launch would take crewmen ashore in port. The captain of the *Mei Ping* was an Estonian, Peter G. A. Mender. One other European was in the crew: Mario Blasina of Trieste, Italy, who was chief engineer of the 206-foot steam tanker. The ship had a diverse cargo including two grades of gasoline, lubricating oil, diesel oil, kerosene, and fuel oil—most of which was in drums and cans.[16]

The *Mei Hsia*, captained by A. B. Jorgensen of Bergen, Norway, was a near-sistership of the *Mei Ping*, although she was a year older, dating from 1927. Both vessels had full deckhouses covering their bulk tanks, and, aside from their lack of guns, looked much like gunboats. The cargo of the *Mei Hsia* was similar to that of the *Mei Ping*.

The *Mei An* was something of a mystery in that, even though she was the senior ship in the Socony fleet, she was not well known because she had achieved none of the notoriety associated with the shooting incidents that were so common on the river. Her net tonnage was about 925, some 125 tons less than the other two tankers in the convoy. Curiously, Socony had never converted her from coal to oil. Leaving Nanking on this occasion, all her cargo was canned kerosene and lubricating oil, somewhat less flammable than the diverse cargoes carried on the other two ships.

The *Mei An* seems to have been regarded as the least prestigious of the three ships, but her captain, Carl H. Carlson of Waterbury, Connecticut, was a 20-year veteran with the company who had been chief mate of the *Mei Ping* in 1928 when she was new. Perhaps he was

14. Statement of J. V. Pickering, Socony-Vacuum superintendent at Nanking, at the U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December 18, 1937, Whiting Papers, Hoover Institution, Palo Alto, California.

15. For details of the attack see the previously-cited books by Perry and Koginos, or the article by Swanson.

16. Exhibit 10(5), U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December, 1937.

now aboard the *Mei An* because she traded on the China coast as well as the river, and he was known to have a deepwater license.[17]

At about one-thirty in the afternoon of December 12, 1937, the first aircraft appeared over the anchored convoy. Although Navy and Socony personnel noticed the high-level planes with curiosity, no one was aware that an attack was underway until the first bomb actually hit close to the bow of the *Panay*, causing extensive damage to the gunboat. Moments later a group of dive bombers started a run on the ships, at which time all hands became fully aware of the danger. The impact of the attack

The Yangtze was an important east-west link in a country with a primitive transportation system. The *Panay* convoy incident occurred near Nanking on the lower river.

on the *Panay* and her crew has been fully documented elsewhere, but little has been written about what happened on the merchant ships. For that reason, the balance of this description of the attack will focus on the events aboard the Socony ships.

As the vessel closest to the *Panay*, the *Mei Ping* felt the impact of the explosion from the gunboat as well as from several near-misses in the water. Captain Mender immediately rang up stand-by on the engine order telegraph, and began heaving in the anchor. Shortly after getting underway the *Mei Ping* took a bomb hit just abaft the bridge in the captain's quarters which started a fire. Recognizing the seriousness of his situation, Mender tried to make for the northwest bank of the river to beach the ship for the safety of his passengers. Enroute there, the ship was hit by machine gun fire from a plane astern, and bombs dropping close aboard caused further damage. Nearing the shore, Mender discovered that some of the smaller vessels which had fled in this direction were now being machine gunned from the river bank. Consequently, he reversed course and made for the southeast bank of the river, crossing through the field of fire from the planes. During this crossing the *Mei Ping* was hit several more times by bombs, but retained steering control. As he approached a mooring pontoon belonging to a Japanese iron mining company Mender encountered another bomb blast only a few feet from the bow, but was able to slam the *Mei Ping* alongside and to get a pair of mooring wires quickly onto the float. Fortunately, none of his crew or passengers had been seriously injured.[18]

During the risky trip back and forth across the river Mender had been given considerable assistance by eight *Panay* crewmen on board who helped raise the anchor, steer the ship, fight fires, and administer first aid. His own sailors, explained Mender later, "were out of control, they were Chinese. . . . I am sure that if we did not have the *Panay* sailors aboard that we could not have gotten alongside the dock."[19]

Aboard the *Mei Hsia* things had not been as frantic as on the *Mei Ping*. As the most upstream vessel in the anchorage, lying in the general direction from which the attack came, she was hit early, but the blast did not damage the ship to any degree—even though a number of her crewmen were thrown into the water. Inasmuch as the *Panay* had obviously begun to sink, Captain Jorgensen got underway with a lighter still alongside and brought the *Mei Hsia* alongside the gunboat to offer whatever assistance he could, and to take off any passengers and crew. But the officers of the *Panay* waved him off, concerned that the proximity of the tanker created a hazard. By this time the abandon ship order had been given on the gunboat, and one civilian passenger, correspon-

17. Tocchio, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

18. Statement of Captain Peter G. A. Mender at U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December 18, 1937.

19. *Ibid.*

dent Jim Marshall of *Colliers*, leaped from the *Panay* to the deck of the *Mei Hsia* while it was alongside. Jorgensen then maneuvered to pick up his crewmen who had drifted down on the *Panay*, assisted in this effort by the smaller tanker *Mei Yi*. The *Mei Hsia* then made for the southeast bank of the river where she tied up alongside the *Mei Ping* which was no longer burning.[20]

The events aboard the third Socony ship, the *Mei An*, must necessarily be reconstructed from the testimony of distant eyewitnesses, inasmuch as no American or European aboard survived to describe what had happened. There may have been Chinese survivors, but they understandably melted away into the landscape, frightened and not interested in coming forth to tell their stories. Sketchy accounts from observers on other ships suggest that the *Mei An* was hit early with a bomb that wiped out her bridge. She was underway at the time, and was subsequently beached on the northwest bank, downstream from the rest of the convoy, with her captain apparently already dead. The body of Captain Carlson was later recovered; it is likely that the body of his quartermaster was also found, inasmuch as he was definitely identified as a casualty. But no one will ever know what went on aboard the *Mei An* during her brief experience in combat. Just as her early career went largely unnoticed, so did her demise.

When the *Panay* was abandoned at about 2:30 p.m. her officers and crew made for the northwest bank of the river; two trips were required in the ship's boats to get all personnel including the wounded ashore. The two surviving Socony ships had gone to the opposite shore with the eight *Panay* crewmen and correspondent Jim Marshall still on board. Thus, the Americans and Europeans in the convoy were split into two groups even before the attack ended, a circumstance that was to make later efforts to locate the survivors more difficult.

At the landing on the southeast bank the *Mei Ping* and *Mei Hsia* had been secured in reasonably good condition, the fires on deck having been extinguished and only a few passengers and crewmen wounded. The bombing had ceased. A large group of Japanese soldiers, estimated at more than one hundred, now appeared on the river bank. They first ordered everyone off the two ships. The Chinese were searched to see if any of them might have been soldiers; one company employee, a chauffeur wearing his uniform, was singled out for particular scrutiny until Captain Mender verified his civilian status. After nearly an hour ashore, everyone was allowed to return aboard the ships to recover belongings. While the ships were once more full of people the bombing began again. The planes which had returned to their base for additional bombs and ammunition were back, concentrating their attack on the *Mei Ping* and *Mei Hsia* inasmuch as the *Panay* was clearly going down.[21]

This low-level bombing and strafing attack resulted in a number of explosions and fires on board the two tankers. Those people on board fled for the shore, but some Chinese were trapped below decks and did not get out. As escapees scrambled up the bank the Japanese troops tried to block their way. Considerable confusion existed; apparently the soldiers did not understand how their planes could be attacking these ships unless the people aboard were enemies. Attempts to point out the American flags which were visible on the ships seemed to make no difference. Eventually the machine gun fire from the planes became so indiscriminate that the soldiers began waving Japanese flags at the pilots to let them know of their presence. But with the same myopic zeal that had characterized the attack all afternoon the pilots ignored their countrymen. Several of the soldiers were killed before their leader assembled the unit and marched it away from the river.

Near-chaos existed now as Chinese came streaming off the burning vessels, fanning out into the nearby countryside. The two captains, the *Panay* crewmen, and the American/European passengers huddled on the foreshore with a few Chinese stragglers, tending to their wounded and trying to determine what to do and where to go. No consensus emerged; a group of three—an American businessman, the correspondent Marshall, and one *Panay* sailor—started upriver along the railroad track while the Socony men, the few Chinese, and the other seven Navy men went inland on the rail spur. The latter group travelled about a mile and a half before finding a small village where they spent the night. The other three men plodded along until they found a farmer who put them up for the night.

The following day both groups were found, the larger one by HMS *Bee* searching along the river, and the smaller one, after covering almost 20 miles, when they came in contact with Japanese troops who took them to Wuhu,

20. Statement of Captain A. B. Jorgensen at U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December 18, 1937.

21. Statements before U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December 18, 1937, by J. V. Pickering, John B. Sherwood, Mario Blasina, F. H. Vines, Captain A. B. Jorgensen, and Captain Peter G. A. Mender.

The *Mei Ping*—Six American evacuees were aboard the vessel when it was attacked by Japanese planes. Photo courtesy of the U.S. Naval Historical Center.

another 20 miles further upstream. At last the ordeal was ending. With the evacuation of all survivors to the relative safety of Shanghai within the next few days the rescue was completed.

Now it was time for the explanations, excuses, apologies, reparations—all the things that Japan would find necessary to offer in order to appease worldwide public opinion which was quickly swelling in response to the vicious and senseless attack. Much of the aftermath of the *Panay* convoy incident has been widely documented elsewhere; it will be useful here to consider only those aspects which have not been brought out in other studies.

Japan's lame explanation for the tragedy was that it was all a case of mistaken identity. Inasmuch as observers on the *Panay* and the Socony ships all described the day as bright and clear and the large painted flags and other marks of recognition on the ships as being highly visible, American reaction to the Japanese explanation has always been incredulous: how could anyone not recognize these ships as American? But perhaps overlooked in the understandable rejection of that explanation is the mind set of the Japanese pilots. As Lieutenant Masatake Okumiya, commander of the second wave of aircraft, noted a decade and a half later, "We were informed that an advance Army unit had reported seven large merchant ships and three smaller ones fleeing the capital, loaded to capacity with Chinese troops . . . . It was requested that the naval air arm make an attack. It was rumored that a successful attack might earn a unit citation."[22] Thus, not only were these pilots given information that could easily lead them to conclude that the large number of vessels in the river constituted a military evacuation fleet, but they

22. Masatake Okumiya, assisted by Roger Pineau, "How the *Panay* Was Sunk," Naval Institute *Proceedings*, June, 1953.

were tacitly reminded that as naval aviators, for whom ship targets would continue to be rare in a war that was being fought in mainland China, this was a fleeting opportunity.

As Hamilton Darby Perry observes in his book on the *Panay* incident, "To the Japanese pilots, the small boat movement seemed to confirm the report that these were Chinese vessels with troops aboard. Some of the troops were probably being put ashore in small boats to fight again."[23] Perry's observation notwithstanding, most accounts of the events of that day ignore the total number of vessels present and the small-boat activity going on among them, circumstances which could have suggested to the pilots that they had indeed found the ten ships—seven large and three smaller—about which they had been briefed.

The *Panay*, *Mei Ping*, *Mei Hsia*, and *Mei An* were each longer than 190 feet, while the *Mei Ying* and *Mei Yi* were perhaps 80 feet in length, and the bulk freighter #206 was probably at least 100 feet long. These could have been the "seven large merchant ships" anticipated by the pilots of the small bi-plane bombers and fighters. The two sets of junks could have provided the other "three smaller" vessels mentioned in the intelligence report, as well as giving a Chinese look to the convoy.

Consequently, it appears reasonable to conclude that it was the convoy, not the *Panay*, that drew the attack. In the absence of the *Panay* the attack probably would have still taken place, but in the absence of the Socony vessels the *Panay* would probably not have been disturbed. Score one for the critics of American foreign policy who had long argued that the presence of Americans in China would draw the country into military incidents.

The reparations which were paid promptly by the Japanese attest to the size of Socony's involvement in the incident. The company submitted a total claim for $1,594,436. The largest portion of this claim, $1,127,895, was for the loss of twelve vessels and four sampans. The next largest item was $300,000 for lost earnings for the time the vessels were out of service, followed by $108,906 for the value of the cargo which had been lost. The final item of $57,635 represented the loss of cash, together with company and personal property. Also included in this last amount was $500 for Captain Carlson's funeral, and $25,000 for death benefits and hospitalization expenses for company employees.[24]

23. Perry, *op. cit.*, p. 73.
24. Exhibits 10(1) through 10(6), U.S. Navy *Panay* Inquiry aboard USS *Augusta*, December, 1937.

The Navy's claim included $604,355 for the loss of the ship as well as governmental and personal property, and $607,000 for the deaths and injuries to the crew. Clearly, the lives of American servicemen were valued much more highly than were those of American merchant officers or Chinese seamen. The final amount paid by the Japanese in reparations totalled $1,287,942 to Socony-Vacuum, $306,494 less than the amount the company had claimed; the Navy received $926,065 in compensation, $285,290 less than the amount claimed.[25]

The *Panay* convoy incident marked the beginning of a fairly rapid demise of American shipping on the Yangtze. Socony tried to operate with what was left of its fleet, but Japanese intimidation and dominance made those operations unpredictable at best. In 1938 for example, the *Mei Yun* was denied permission to go from the upper river to Shanghai for repairs; that same year the *Mei Heng* was machine gunned by Japanese planes at Changsha, and the launch *Mei Foo V* was boarded by Japanese troops.[26] Amid that environment the company transferred or otherwise disposed of some of its ships in the late 1930s, including the *Mei Ming* which inexplicably was transferred to a Socony affiliate in Japan.

Thus, while the *Panay* convoy incident may have served as the prelude to a war that was soon to come, it was also a prelude to the four-year interim struggle for survival of American shipping on the Yangtze. When that drama ended there were only two players left on the stage, the surviving Socony ships *Mei Foo* and *Mei Nan*, to be captured by the Japanese at the outset of World War II. The short-term maritime fortunes of Socony-Vacuum for which the events of 1937 had been a prelude turned out badly, but the war with Japan for which those events had been a more widely heralded prelude would ultimately have a more satisfactory resolution for broader American interests.

25. Frank Dorn, *The Sino-Japanese War, 1937-41*. New York: Macmillan Company, 1974, p. 96.
26. *Foreign Relations of the United States*, 1938, v. II. Washington: Government Printing Office, pp. 207, 513, 337.

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Armed Merchantmen and Privateers: Another Perspective On America's Quasi-War With France

JOHN D. PELZER

WE should greet the recent publication of Michael A. Palmer's study *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War With France* favorably.[1] The history of America's undeclared naval war with France is a subject which has been too long neglected by historians of America's naval past, and the renewed interest in these formative years of the U.S. Navy caused by Palmer's contribution of a modern naval history of the conflict is indeed welcome. The importance of this or any other naval history of this conflict cannot be denied, but a different perspective, an additional dimension, on the subject exists which such accounts fail to fully consider. To complement rather than to refute such studies, I suggest that the private operations of America's merchant marine during this conflict were equally important in nature and even more extensive in scope than the operations of the nation's fledgling navy.

The arming of American merchant ships is probably the least studied of the United States' defensive strategies during the Quasi-War with France in the late 1790s. Because historians, most notably Marshall Smelser,[2] have viewed the conflict's primary importance as providing the impetus for the permanent formation of the United States Navy, the role of armed merchant vessels in this conflict has tended to be overlooked. If America's Quasi-War gave birth to the American Navy, it does not necessarily follow that, despite the numerous successes of American warships in individual actions, the American Navy was, at that stage in its development, wholly adequate to fulfill its primary function of protecting American commerce. The inadequacy of the U.S. Navy during this stage of its infancy left the primary responsibility of defending American merchant ships upon merchant ships. Neither were these limited naval resources entirely devoted to the defense of American shipping. Despite the public claims of President John Adams and his Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, the role of the Navy was intended to be offensive rather than defensive, with the use of warships for convoy duty only a last resort. In the end, it fell to the merchant vessel, armed for its own defense, to perform the primary task of the war—to provide protection for American commerce on the high seas.

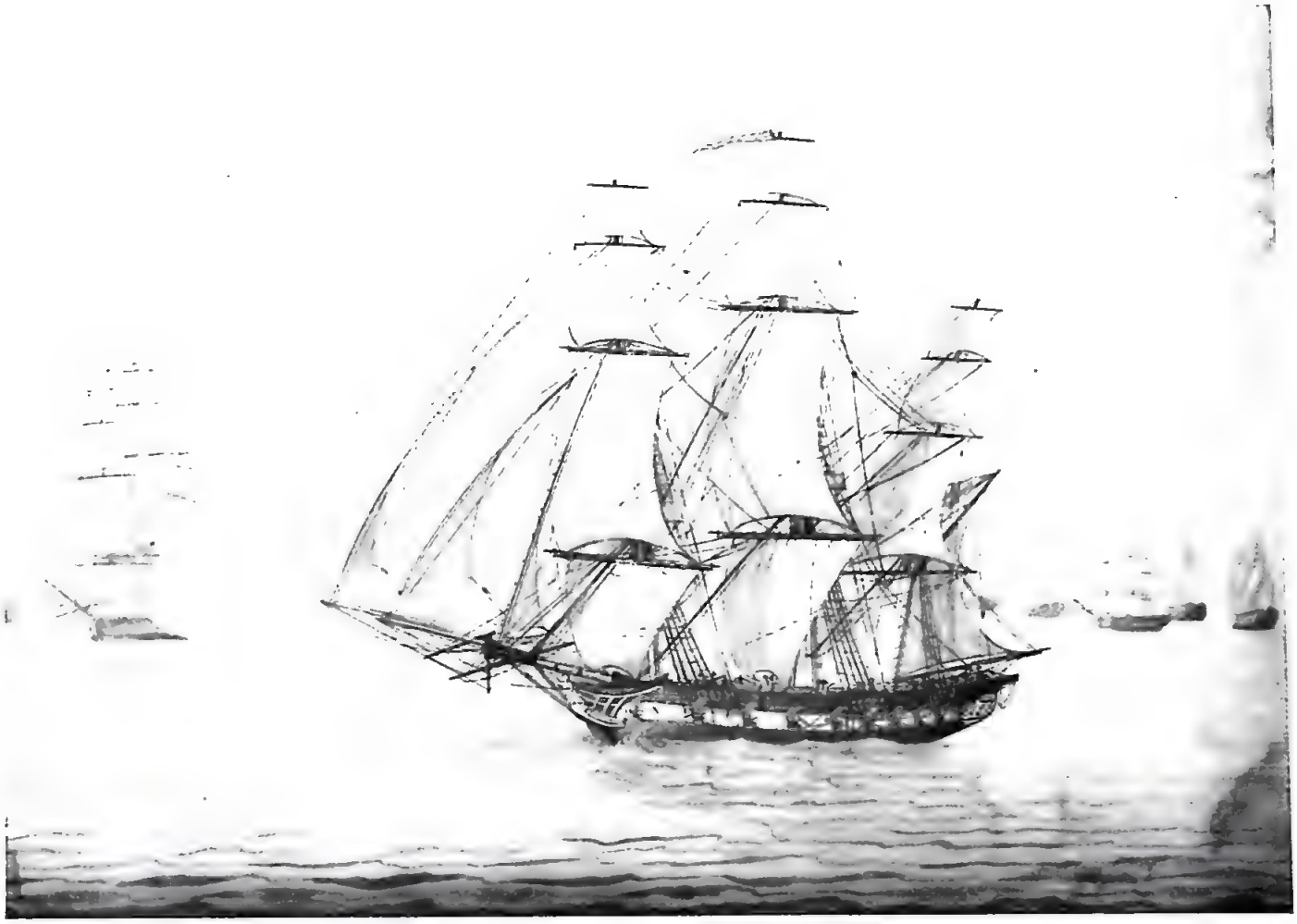
In a sense, the conflict which became the Quasi-War was merely the culmination of a series of events which marked a deterioration of Franco-American relations during the late 1790s. After the signing of Jay's Treaty with Britain in 1794-5, the French watched with increasing concern what they perceived to be America's growing support for Great Britain in its war with France. Gradually, the policies of the French government became increasingly antagonistic towards the United States. On July 2, 1796, the Executive Directory issued a decree which revised the French position toward neutral shipping and particularly towards American shipping. At a glance, the decree may have seemed innocent enough. It announced the French intention to treat neutral shipping, as Secretary of State Timothy Pickering later reported to Congress, "by the manner in which they suffer the English to treat them."[3] The consequences of this decree, however, were to prove far more grave than most suspected.

In practice, the act proved to be a disaster for American foreign trade. At Malaga and Cadiz on the Northern coast of Spain, the French consuls interpreted the decree to allow the seizure of American merchant ships in the strategic Straits of Gibraltar and to authorize their subse-

1. Michael A. Palmer, *Stoddert's War: Naval Operations During the Quasi-War with France, 1798-1801* (Columbia, S.C., 1987). See also Gardner W. Allen, *Our Naval War with France* (Boston, 1909), and William G. Anderson, "John Adams, the Navy, and the Quasi-War with France," *American Neptune* 30 (April 1970), pp. 117-132.

2. Marshall Smelser, *The Congress Founds the Navy, 1787-1798* (Notre Dame, In., 1959).

3. Martin P. Claussen, ed., *Administration of John Adams, 1797-1801, Part II: Text of Documents* (National State Papers of the United States, 1789-1817; Wilmington, Del., 1980), II, p. 14.



American ship *Mount Vernon* at Naples, 1799, engaging French merchantmen. Photo courtesy of the Peabody Museum of Salem.

quent condemnation for no more cause than being bound for a British port. Closer to home, matters were even worse. In the West Indies, "whose seas swarm with privateers and gun-boats," as one contemporary noted, the capture of American merchant vessels rapidly became a thriving local industry.[4] There ships and cargoes were seized and condemned in French colonial courts without the owner even being admitted to the proceedings to present the vessel's defense. On June 22, 1797, Secretary of State Pickering reported to Congress:

> This seems to be done systematically, and for the obvious purpose of ensuring condemnations. By monstrous abuse in judicial proceedings, frauds and falsehoods, as well as flimsy and shameless pretexts, pass unexamined and uncontradicted, and are made the foundations of the sentences of condemnation.[5]

The extent of the French depredations against American commerce had clearly become intolerable. Between July 1796 and June 1797, French warships and privateers captured no fewer than 308 American merchant vessels.[6] To make matters worse, in May 1797, the Executive Directory of the French government failed to recognize the newly appointed American Ambassador, C. C. Pinckney, and instead presented the United States with a vague demand for redress of grievances. The insult to American national honor was clear. In all, French actions seemed

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

5. *Ibid.*
6. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15, 160-180.

to provide more than ample provocation for an American response.

Franco-American relations had deteriorated to the point that, by the time that he took office, John Adams felt compelled to call Congress into special session to inform them of the developments in Paris. On May 16, 1797, Adams told the special session:

> The refusal on the part of France to receive our minister is . . . to treat us neither as allies, nor as friends, nor as a sovereign State. . . . Such attempts ought to be repelled with the decision which shall convince France, and the world, that we are not to be miserable instruments of foreign influence; and regardless of national honor, character, and interest.[7]

Although Adams was committed to peace, he nonetheless advised Congress to prepare for war and went on to recommend the establishment of a permanent system of naval defense, an increase in the size of the regular army, and a revision of the laws regarding the organization, arming, and disciplining of the militia. Among these defensive measures, Adams suggested the arming of the nation's merchant vessels for their own defense.

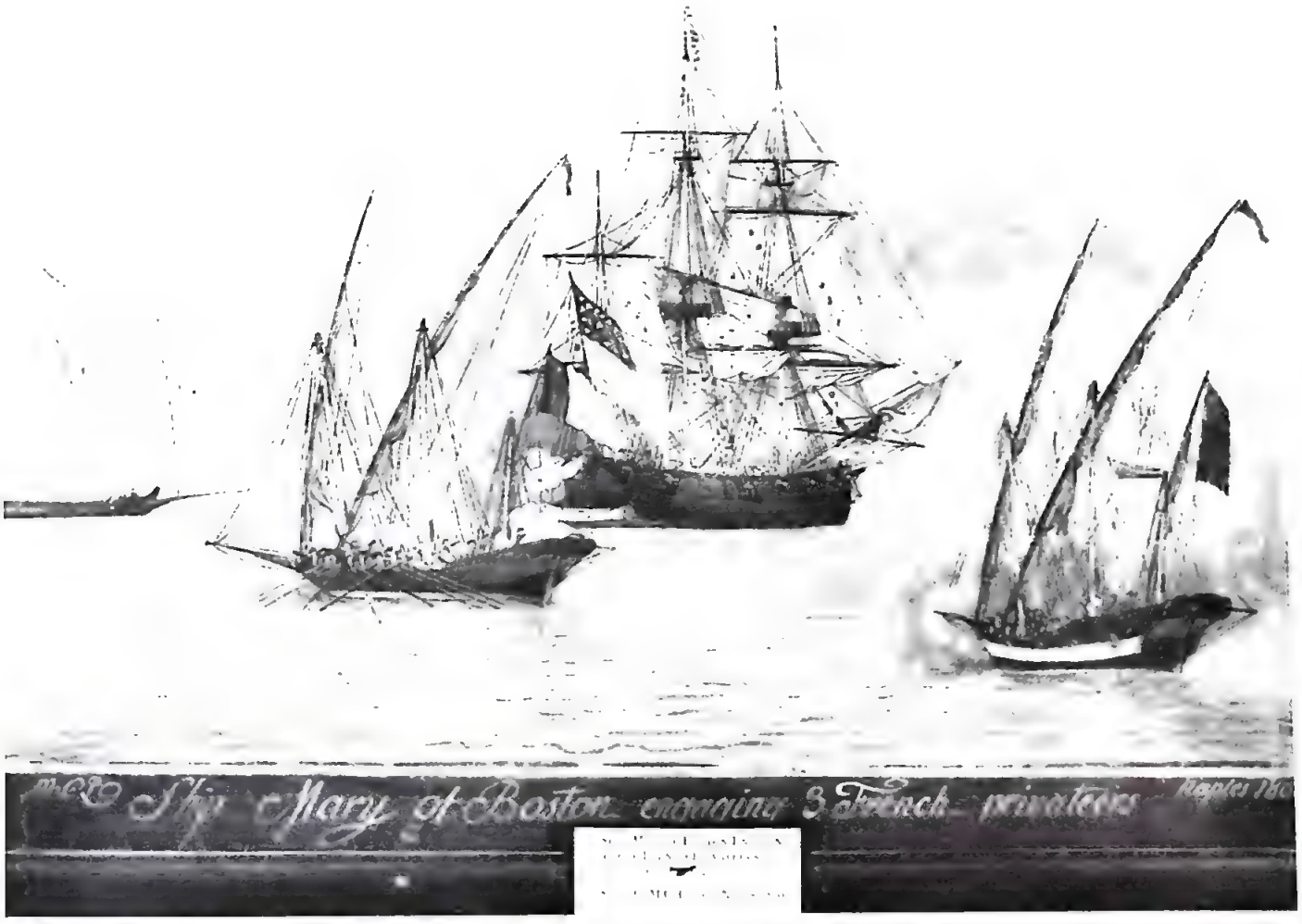
Adams' speech, however, failed to move Congress to authorize the arming of American merchant vessels. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect. On June 6, 1797, Benjamin Goodhue, a Salem, Massachusetts, merchant and Hamiltonian Federalist, introduced a bill to prohibit the arming of private ships in American ports. Although the bill was ostensibly intended to prohibit the arming of foreign warships and privateers, the bill nonetheless provided "that no merchant vessel, armed within the United States should be cleared out, destined to any foreign country, except the East Indies, until further regulations should be made on the subject by Congress."[8] Although it was intended to support Adams' policy on the arming of foreign privateers in American ports, the bill instead would have effectively eliminated the arming of American merchant vessels for their own protection. The bill was later amended to alleviate this flaw, but the session of Congress ended before the bill could be brought to a final vote and the matter was not pursued when Congress reconvened.[9]

While Congress remained inactive, the attacks upon American shipping continued, and Adams grew increasingly impatient with Congressional inactivity on the matter of arming merchant vessels. "We must unshackle our merchant ships," Adams wrote to Oliver Wolcott, his Secretary of the Treasury, in October 1797. "If Congress will not do it, I shall have scruples about continuing the restriction [against allowing merchant vessels to clear customs armed] upon the collectors."[10] Still, however, Adams would not take action without the approval of Congress. Only after the near hysteria following the XYZ Affair was the matter of arming merchant vessels again introduced in Congress. Even then, however, it required the prompting of Adams. On March 19, 1798, Adams withdrew the instructions to the customs collectors to restrain American merchant vessels from sailing armed. But Adams' action did not convince everyone.

Even at the height of the anti-French sentiment, opposition to the arming of American merchant vessels existed. Fears remained among some Republicans that the arming of American merchant vessels would lead to all out war with France. On April 2, 1798, Joseph Varnum, a Massachusetts Republican and an outspoken critic of the Adams administration, presented a petition to Congress from the residents of Milton, Massachusetts, expressing their alarm that the arming of merchant vessels would place the nation's peace in the hands of the masters of merchant ships, "many of whom," the petition stated, "were formerly British subjects, and who . . . still retain all their English prejudices against the French."[11] Neither was the town of Milton alone in its pro-French leanings. On the following day, Albert Gallatin presented to Congress a memorial from forty members of the Pennsylvania legislature opposing the arming of merchant ships, and on April 13, Varnum introduced a second petition, this time from Cambridge, Massachusetts, expressing its opposition as well. The public response, however, was insufficient to rally much support.[12]

Republican opposition was, in fact, disorganized, halfhearted, and ineffective in the face of the emotional anti-French tidal wave which overtook Congress. "A ship of a merchant is not less the property of the country than the house of a farmer," Harrison Otis, a Massachusetts Federalist, told the House during debates on April 20. "The sailor who ploughs the ocean is not less than the husbandman who ploughs the soil, . . . they are part of our public and private property which no man would feel authorized to abandon."[13] This view was apparently shared by others in Congress as well.

7. U.S. Presidents, *Messages of the Presidents of the United States* (Columbus, Oh., 1841), p. 85.
8. Claussen, *Admin. of John Adams*, pp. 273-275.
9. U.S., *Annals of Congress*, 5th Cong., 1st Sess., VII, pp. 22-35.
10. Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams, Second President of the United States* (Boston, 1850-1856), VIII, pp. 558-9.
11. U.S., *Annals of Congress*, 5th Cong., 1st Sess., VIII, p. 1367.
12. *Ibid.*, pp. 1373, 1413.
13. *Ibid.*, pp. 1488-1489.



Ship *Mary* of Boston engaging three French privateers off Malaga, March 8, 1799. From Knox, *Naval Documents,* Vol II. Photo courtesy of Peabody Museum of Salem.

In fact, such nationalist sentiments swept away the Republican opposition, and in the spring and summer of 1798, a flurry of bills to re-establish the navy and enhance the public defense were enacted. On March 27, Congress authorized the early completion of the three new frigates under construction and a month later approved the purchase or construction of twelve additional vessels. Ships were of little value without the authority to use them, but soon this oversight as well was corrected. On May 28, Congress authorized American naval vessels to take and capture "any armed vessels operating off the [American] coast."[14] Together, these acts provided the groundwork for America's naval war with France.

Included in the bills which were passed that summer were those authorizing the arming of merchant ships for their own defense. On June 25, 1798, Congress passed the first bill, which not only allowed private vessels to

14. Dudley W. Knox, ed., *Naval Documents Related to the Quasi-War with France* (Washington, 1935-1938), I, pp. iv, v.

sail armed but also empowered the crews of merchant ships to "oppose and defend against any search, restraint or seizure . . . by the commander or crew of any vessel under French colors" provided the owners posted bonds to insure against use of the armament against neutral shipping.[15] On July 9, Congress passed a second bill which authorized the granting of commissions to merchantmen to defend themselves against the depredations of the French. While efforts were under way to build a navy, American merchant ships were to be armed to defend themselves.[16]

By the end of May, American warships, one or two per month, began putting to sea, and what has generally been called America's Quasi-War with France began in earnest. But the frenzy of activity in Washington in 1798 must have seemed a painfully slow process for the merchant ships at sea. For the Navy, the war was only beginning, but for American merchant ships, the war was already in its second year. The operations of French privateers had already caused major disruptions of American trade. In March 1797, for instance, French privateers besieged fourteen American merchant vessels at the port of Malaga on the coast of Spain for three months. The American ships only managed to escape when they fell in with two English frigates, which escorted them out of the harbor.[17]

The dangers faced by American merchant vessels in the Mediterranean were severe, but the problems faced in the Caribbean were even greater. The Caribbean had long been a center for the operations of French privateers. In June 1797, Secretary of State Pickering reported that the "seas [of the West Indies] swarm with privateers and gun-boats, which have been called forth by the latitude allowed to their depredations."[18] From numerous islands in the West Indies, the small French privateering vessels called picaroons preyed upon American shipping. It was estimated, for instance, that in August 1798, between sixty and eighty privateers were operating from the single island of Guadeloupe.[19] The operations of these privateers posed a serious threat to American shipping.

One of the most effective ways for the Navy to provide protection for American commerce from the depredations of French privateers was to convoy shipping through their areas of operation. Although the merchants and shipowners clearly favored this tactic, the Navy made only limited use of this form of protection. Part of the reason was logistical. The resources of America's Navy were too limited to allow adequate protection for American shipping. In his address of May 16, 1797, Adams told Congress that a naval force could not be formed "as speedily and extensively as the present crisis demands."[20] In this, Adams had been prophetic. By March 1798, apart from a few revenue cutters, the United States had no warships ready for sea, and even after that date the build up of forces was gradual at best. The Navy was never able, at this point in its development, to provide adequate forces for the defense of American commerce on the high seas.[21]

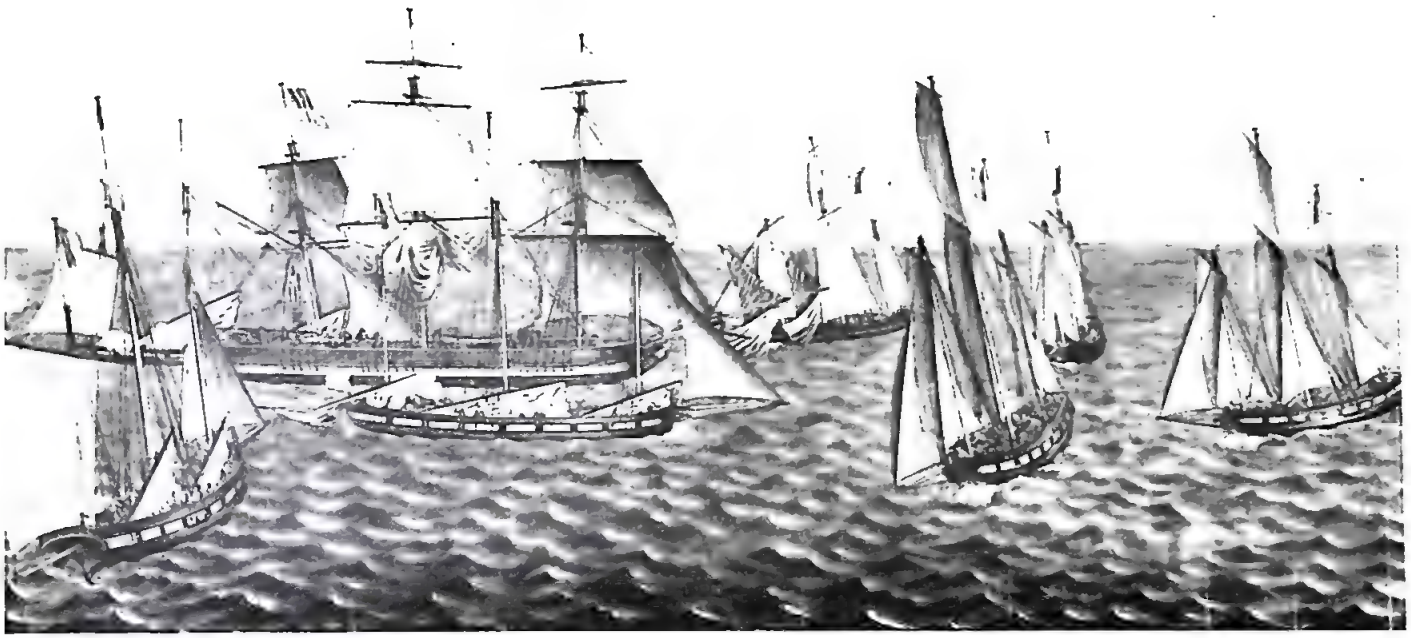
Another major reason for this hesitancy to convoy shipping was policy. Throughout America's Quasi-War with France, the consistent policy of both Adams and his Secretary of the Navy, Benjamin Stoddert, was to reserve, as much as possible, the Navy's meager resources for offensive operations against the bases of the privateers. Adams envisioned the use of American warships as "fast-sailing frigates to scour the sea" while merchant vessels were armed "to defend themselves against all unlawful aggressors, and take and burn and destroy all vessels . . . that shall attack them."[22] Stoddert also seemed to be in total agreement with this policy. In September 1798, Stoddert wrote to a Connecticut merchant:

> Our Force is yet to[o] small to admit the convoying of our Trade; and it has been thought that it would be rendered the most effective Security to it, in our power to render, to find employment for the French Cruisers, about their own islands, by attacking them there.[23]

This policy to avoid the use of warships for convoy duty was to have major consequences for American merchant ships.

The result of this aggressive policy, as strategically sound as it may have been, was effectively to force American merchant vessels to defend themselves. This was particularly true of the vessels engaged in the European and Mediterranean trade, which sailed throughout the conflict without escort from American naval vessels and were forced to defend themselves from the French

15. Claussen, *Admin. of John Adams*, IX, pp. 18-19.
16. Ibid., pp. 148-9.
17. Knox, *Naval Documents*, I, pp. 20, 27.
18. Claussen, *Admin. of John Adams*, IX, pp. 14-15.
19. Knox, *Naval Documents*, I, p. 336.
20. U.S. Presidents, *Messages of the Presidents*, p. 86.
21. John C. Miller, The Federalist Era, 1789-1801 (New York: Harper & Row, 1960), p. 215.
22. Adams, *Works of John Adams*, IX, p. 607.
23. Knox, *Naval Documents*, I, pp. 425-6.



The *Betsey* of Philadelphia being attacked by seven French privateers. Photo courtesy of the Mariner's Museum, Newport News, Virginia.

and Spanish privateers which infested the waters around Gibraltar.

Initially, the arming of merchant vessels proved to be a relatively effective deterrent to the depredations of French privateers, which were generally ill-equipped to overcome armed resistance. "The French Privateers are but badly prepared for action," Stoddert reported to Adams in August 1798. "They are seldom well armed, and they afford no protection to their Men—they cannot meet [ships in battle] except to board vessels of equal force in guns."[24] This proved to be particularly the case in the European trade, where armed merchant vessels achieved many notable successes in the strategic Straits of Gibraltar. In October 1798, the American Ambassador to Spain reported that one privateer returned to the Spanish port of San Sebastian "in a scattered condition," with its captain, first officer, and seven of its crew killed while the American merchant vessel it attacked continued upon its voyage.[25] The policy also provided political advantages for the Adams administration: "When our merchants are armed, if they are taken, they cannot blame the government."[26] For the government, the arming of merchant vessels proved a satisfactory course of action.

The armed merchant vessels faced many dangers, as can be illustrated by the voyage of the armed merchant ship *Mary*. The *Mary* sailed from Hancock's Wharf in Boston with a cargo of sugar and fish on January 30, 1799, and passed through the Straits of Gibraltar on March 6. It did not take long for the *Mary* to encounter privateers. Just before dusk on the following day, the crew spotted an armed vessel to the landward. Nothing happened throughout the night, but by the following morning a second privateer had joined the first and together both moved to the attack. For two hours, the fight con-

24. *Ibid.*, p. 336.

25. Ibid., p. 507.
26. Adams, *Works of John Adams*, IX, pp. 607-608.

tinued until about noon, when the privateers moved off and the *Mary* was able to make its escape. The ordeal of the *Mary*, however, was only beginning.

The *Mary* continued on its voyage, and for the next twenty-four hours nothing of incident occurred until, on the following afternoon, four privateers were spotted to the east. Two of the privateers moved to the attack and kept up a running fight with the *Mary* with a round and grape shot which lasted until nightfall. By sunrise on the following morning, the *Mary* had anchored safely in Malaga Roads. The passage of the *Mary* well illustrated the effectiveness of arming merchant vessels. While the *Mary* survived her ordeal without casualties among her crew, her opponents had not been so lucky. Soon after the *Mary*'s arrival, one of the privateers with which it had been fighting entered the harbor with two of its crew dead and thirteen wounded.[27]

It was at Havana, however, on the northern coast of Cuba, where American merchant shipping faced its severest test. By the summer of 1798, the situation in the West Indies was so bad that French privateers literally held an entire fleet of American merchant ships hostage at that port. First-hand accounts of the situation vary greatly. On August 10, 1798, for instance, Secretary of the Navy Stoddert reported that sixty merchant vessels were awaiting convoy, with little chance of escaping the French cruisers. The situation then deteriorated still further. On August 18, a Salem merchant reported that some twenty to thirty French privateers were preventing one hundred merchant ships from sailing from Havana. To confuse matters still further, Stoddert submitted a second report on August 25 reporting eighty vessels with cargoes valued at two million dollars blockaded at Havana by privateers. Whatever the exact status of events in Cuba, the situation was unquestionably grave.[28]

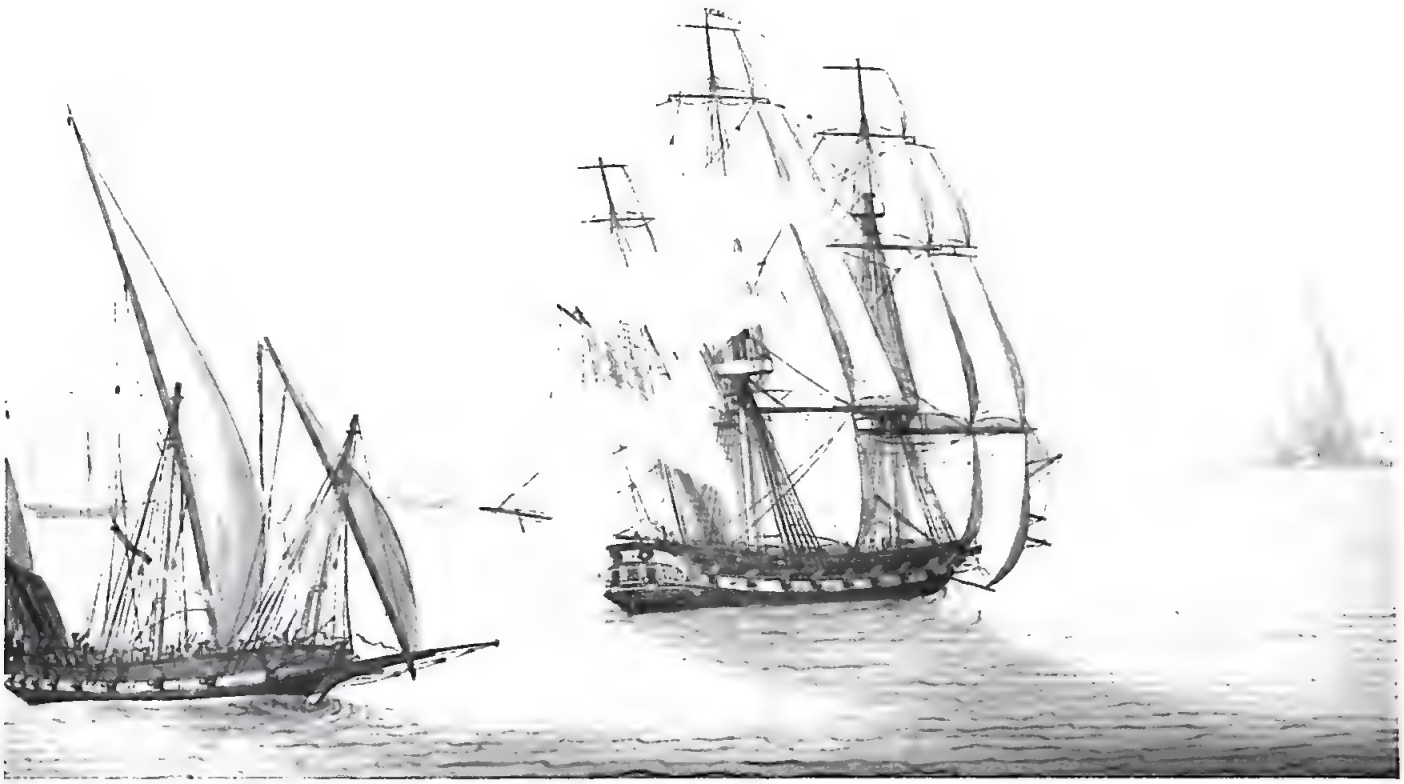
Since the government lacked the resources to break the stalemate in Cuba, the authorization to arm proved a godsend for the American merchant vessels blockaded in Havana harbor and certainly improved morale among the sailors on the American merchant vessels. On September 5, 1798, *Claypoole's Daily Advertiser* reported "a very visable [sic] alteration in their conduct" with the arrival of two armed American merchant ships.[29] Reassurance was not safety, however, as the merchant fleet would soon discover.

On Sunday, August 19, 1798, after a virtual siege of sixty-eight days, a fleet of sixty-seven ships sailed from Havana under the escort of the nineteen-gun, armed merchant ship *Eliza*, commanded by Captain John Morrison, and two other armed merchantmen all hired by the members of the convoy to provide protection. For the first week, the voyage went well, but on the afternoon of August 26, 1798, the fleet encountered the French frigate *Preyoyante*. At the approach of a strange ship, Morrison signaled the convoy to close upon the *Eliza*, but as darkness approached, the convoy fell increasingly into confusion and became scattered. Many of the faster vessels abandoned the convoy, using their speed to escape, while the *Eliza* remained to escort the slower vessels. By morning, the frigate had taken nine prizes, including the Danish ship *Bernstrosse*, a Danish schooner, and several American vessels. The majority, however, made it safely intact to an American port.[30]

Legally, the armed merchant vessels were commissioned to defend themselves from French armed ships and privateers, yet some of these vessels, motivated by resentment of French aggressions, undertook offensive operations. On August 26, 1798, the armed merchant schooner *Amphrite*, of ten guns and twenty-two men, overtook a ship and a schooner near the island of Grenada in the West Indies. The *Amphrite* had just moved into hailing distance and Captain Thomas Snell was ready to reach for his speaking trumpet when a broadside burst from the ship. The volley did no damage, however, and Snell's crew, already at quarters, immediately returned fire. It proved to be a lively fight lasting two and a half hours, but at the end, with six guns dismounted and ammunition running low, Snell was forced to withdraw the *Amphrite* from the fight. Despite the aggressive attitude of her commander (or possibly because of it), the career of the *Amphrite* was a short one. On October 7, 1798, the privateer *Fleur de la Mer* plundered the schooner and left her stranded on the Island de Aves. The adventurous career of the *Amphrite* was the exception. For the majority of armed merchant vessels, trade, not fighting, was the goal, and most found flight preferable to battle as a means of defense when the opportunity presented itself.[31]

Until the spring of 1799, armed merchant vessels were able to hold their own against the depredations of the French privateers. "The French Privateers which have infested the Streights of Gibraltor [sic] are very cautious about approaching near American vessels until it is ascertained whether or not it is well armed," the American

27. Knox, *Naval Documents*, II, pp. 296, 426, 431, 432, 435, 463.
28. *Ibid.*, pp. 288, 319, 336.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 149.
30. *Ibid.*, I, pp. 352-3, 373; II, pp. 149, 162.
31. *Ibid.*, II, p. 150.



American ship *Mount Vernon* in Naples, built in Salem, 1798, by artist M. Corné. Photo courtesy of Peabody Museum of Salem.

Ambassador to Spain reported in March 1799.[32] If the arming of merchant vessels proved a deterrent to privateers, however, it proved to be only a temporary one, for in the same report the Ambassador to Spain also warned of larger, better-equipped privateers being fitted out there. Ominous warnings came from other sources as well. In March, Spanish vessels, sailing with French letters of marque, were reported to have taken six prizes in eleven days at Gibraltar. "[S]carcely an unarmed vessel comes into the streights that is not taken," reported an American visitor there.[33] Similar reports of increased privateer activities came from North Africa as well. "[T]he French Privateers stationed hereabouts have of late increased not only in number," reported James Simpson, the American Consul at Tangier, "but several of them have had heavier Guns and more men put on board."[34] Clearly, by the spring and summer of 1799, French privateers around Gibraltar were better equipped, and privateering activities were more extensive.

Although the increased activities of the privateers in the Mediterranean presented an ever-increasing threat for American commerce, neither Adams nor Stoddert was willing to divert American naval forces from the West Indies to Gibraltar to convoy American merchant shipping there. "Although I am very solicitous to strike strokes in Europe," Adams wrote to Stoddert in August 1799, "I

32. *Ibid.*, p. 436.
33. *Ibid.*, pp. 501-2.
34. *Ibid.*, pp. 501-2.

feel the whole force of deciding things in the West Indies, if possible."[35] From what evidence exists, Stoddert supported this position. "[I]n the present State of our Navy," Stoddert wrote to a Marblehead, Massachusetts, merchant in May 1799, "the policy of attempting to convoy our trade to any part of Europe is at least questionable."[36]

The Administration's preoccupation with the West Indies becomes more understandable when one considers the magnitude of the problems that the Navy faced. While at Gibraltar, the French privateers began using larger, more heavily armed vessels, the French picaroons of the West Indies seemed to take quite the opposite approach. As the privateers of the West Indies were driven closer to their bases in the Lesser Antilles, they became increasingly smaller and more difficult for the larger ships of the Navy to bring to battle. These "small fry privateers,"[37] as one American naval officer called them, literally swarmed out of the traditional privateer bases on the West Indian Islands of Martinique, Dominica, and Guadeloupe. The privateering operations on these islands were extensive indeed. Between March and June 1800, privateers based on the island of Guadeloupe alone captured thirty-eight American merchant vessels. In addition, when the British captured the island of St. Domingo and opened it to American trade, privateers established new bases to harass American shipping at St. John, Puerto Rico, where, as one contemporary noted, privateers "swarm around the harbor."[38]

The problems of the American Navy in attempting to control such operations were tremendous, for the privateers posed the type of threat that a formal navy had difficulty controlling. As one American naval officer reported:

> [T]heir art & ingenuity puzzles the imagination, for one would suppose the vast number of our Cruisers, as well as those of the British would discourage them, but the fact is not so, they bid us defiance & feed themselves very handsomely at our expence [sic] for they are like Hydra's heads and multiply daily.[39]

Part of this "art & ingenuity" consisted of the tactics the privateers used in taking their prizes, which the armed merchant vessels were ill-equipped to combat. In July 1799, the American Consul at Curacao reported:

> Permit me to intrude one observation, on the present mode of arming as practiced by the American Merchantmen & to say, that it is extremely erroneous, . . . I seldom find more than 2 men to a Gun, & in the late instances there were no small arms—The Privateers by no means depend on fighting at long shot, but always endeavour to board, are well supplied with suitable Weapons & are crowded with people—I therefore conclude that the Americans w[oul]d do well to meet them, if they can'not avoid it, in their own mode—of Fighting, & have their Vessels well protected with Boarding Netting, they wou[l]d then have some chance & w[oul]d not as in many cases, only supply the Enemy with Cannon & c.[40]

In the face of the threat presented to American merchant shipping by these West Indian privateers, both Adams and his Secretary of the Navy were forced to follow a policy of using naval ships to convoy shipping through the privateer-infested waters of the Caribbean as well as to conduct offensive operations against the privateering ships and their bases. The administration was not always happy with this state of affairs. In April 1799, Secretary of the Navy Stoddert complained to a Baltimore merchant of all his fast vessels being employed "too much in Convoying instead of being kept intirely [sic] for Cruising which arose from the great desire of Commanders to give all possible satisfaction to the merchants."[41]

Even with these measures, however, the Navy was unable to control the activities of the French privateers in the West Indies. In fact, the Navy was not even able to confine their operations to that area. In July 1800, Stoddert wrote to one of his captains:

> Considerable depredations have been lately made on our Commerce, between the WI Islands & our own Coasts—The Guadaloupe Privateers . . . not only capture the American vessels in the WI trade, but make great havoc among those of more value, employed in the European & East India Trade.[42]

Even Stoddert admitted the Navy's inability to provide protection for American commerce. As he complained to a Philadelphia merchant in July 1800:

> I cannot accomplish with less than Forty vessels, twenty times as much as the British Nation can do with twenty times as many—They cannot with all their force give complete protection in their own channel to their merchant vessels, nor should it be expected that there would not be captures of American Vessels in the West Indies, and between the Islands and our own coast—[43]

With the inability of the Navy to provide protection, it fell again upon American merchant ships to defend them-

35. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 29.
36. *Ibid.*, III, p. 162.
37. *Ibid.*, V, p. 177.
38. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 505.
39. *Ibid.*, V, p. 177.
40. *Ibid.*, III, p. 523.
41. *Ibid.*, p. 523.
42. *Ibid.*, VI, p. 149.
43. *Ibid.*, p. 174.

selves even on their own coasts. The experience of the ship *Ann and Hope* was typical.

On the morning of July 30, 1800, the ship *Ann and Hope* was homeward bound from Canton, China, to Providence, Rhode Island, when her crew sighted two sails well astern of the merchantman. By mid-morning, one of the vessels had changed course and disappeared to the West, but a schooner remained in apparent pursuit and closed rapidly on the *Ann and Hope*. By nightfall, the schooner followed literally in the wake of the merchant ship.

The situation was tense as the crew of the *Ann and Hope* remained at quarters throughout the night, closely watching the schooner. At daybreak, the schooner closed upon the *Ann and Hope*. Three or four times the captain of the merchantman attempted to hail the schooner, seeking to discover its intention. Finally, the crew of the *Ann and Hope* fired a warning shot across the schooner's bow. The schooner responded with a broadside. The sea battle which ensued lasted three-quarters of an hour, during which time the *Ann and Hope* expended ninety-four rounds of ammunition. In the end, the *Ann and Hope* was lucky, however, and was able to drive off the attack with only minor damage. Others were not so lucky, and after two years of undeclared war, the toll continued to mount.[44]

By the fall of 1799, Adams was ready to attempt diplomacy, in addition to gunpowder, in an effort to settle America's differences with France, and in September, against the advice of his Cabinet, he asked Congress to appoint envoys to go to Paris to undertake negotiations. Many hoped that the opening of negotiations would decrease the intensity of the naval conflict, and to a limited extent they did. In February 1800, a merchant house in Lisbon reported a change in French attitudes towards American merchant vessels, and at Malaga, in one post, instructions from Paris overturned the condemnation of fourteen neutral vessels, with heavy penalties against the owners of the privateers which detained them. If these incidents raised hopes for an end of the depredations, however, they soon passed. By May, the American minister to Spain reported that the French and Spanish privateers had resumed their operations, while from the West Indies came no reports of a remission of privateer activity at all.[45]

In fairness to the French, however, one has to question the degree of control which the French government held over the activities of their privateers, especially those operating in the West Indies. During the long years of war in Europe, privateering had come to form the basis of the economy for many of the islands. In August 1799, the American Consul at Paramaribo reported that the French island of Cayenne had become "a little Algiers," where privateering provided "the very harvest of Plunder . . . [where] they have no other means of Supplies."[46] In fact, it was increasingly clear that not all depredations were committed by privateers. In December 1799, the American Consul at St. Domingo reported that pirates, "availing themselves of the unsettled state of things," established a base at Gonaives, an island off the coast of Haiti, from which they preyed upon unarmed shipping.[47] Where privateering had become so deeply ingrained in everyday life, it would not be easily removed.

For six months the American envoys pursued negotiations and on September 30, 1800, signed the Convention of Amity and Commerce, which would not only end the fighting, but also restore Franco-American commercial relations. Americans were cautious and hesitant in their acceptance of French intentions to honor the agreement. On December 30, 1800, Stoddert issued instructions to his Captains:

> It will be proper that you treat the armed vessels of France (Public and Private) exactly as you find they treat our Trading vessels—if they continue their depredations, you will continue to capture them—if they cease to molest our trade, you will so conduct yourself, as to convince them that we can return to a State of amity with the French Nation, not only without reluctance—but with pleasure.[48]

By January 1801, word of the treaty began reaching the Caribbean islands, and despite the widespread apprehension of many, the prospects for peace appeared good. On February 6, word reached St. Barts that the equipage of privateers at Guadeloupe had been suspended and that two American merchant ships had been released. Three days later, a second report announced the release of several additional merchant vessels at the same port. American warships on patrol in the Caribbean confirmed the reports as well. "[Y]ou may now assure the Merchants of the United States that their trade will no longer be molested by French Cruisers," Alexander Murray, Captain of the U.S.S. *Constellation*, reported to the Capitol on February 3, 1801. The war which had never really begun was now over.[49]

44. *Ibid.*, pp. 206, 214.
45. *Ibid.*, V, pp. 234-5, 494.
46. *Ibid.*, IV, p. 53.
47. *Ibid.*, p. 505.
48. *Ibid.*, VII, pp. 55-6.
49. *Ibid.*, VIII, pp. 113, 117, 119.

Traditionally, historians have viewed the Quasi-War with France as a series of individual naval actions which served, in their turn, to provide the impetus behind the permanent foundation of the Navy and to train American naval officers for their more famous role in later conflicts. While this contention is valid, it nonetheless gives a misleading view of the nature of America's undeclared naval war with France. For American merchant seamen, the war was not a few isolated battles, but a constant, often deadly, struggle for survival. While the battles of America's new warships served to help vindicate American honor both abroad and at home, the essence of the war was not the battle between navies, but rather the battle between privateers and merchant vessels as they went about their daily routine. For them and for their war, there was no glory. For them there was only trade. This is, indeed, an important, if overlooked, aspect of America's Quasi-War with France.

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Finding Longitude at Sea by Magnetic Declination on Dutch East Indiamen, 1596-1795

KAREL A. DAVIDS

ONE of the methods for finding longitude at sea devised by the Portuguese was the use of observations of magnetic declination. L.de Albuquerque has remarked that these observations started in 1508 at the latest; they may have been made as early as 1505. In the *Tratado da agulha de marear* by João de Lisboa, dating back to 1514, a section is devoted to a discussion of the relation between longitude and magnetic declination. Assuming a simple relationship between variation and longitude, the author believed that the longitude of any place on earth could easily be found by carefully observing the variation of the compass-needle. Francisco Faleiro expressed a similar view in his *Tratado del sphera del mundo y del arte de navegar* (1535).[1]

Although observations on magnetic declination gathered by João de Castro during his voyage from Lisbon to Goa and in the Red Sea in 1538 proved that variation could be different for places on the same meridian and thus raised doubts about the viability of the method proposed by João de Lisboa, the underlying idea was by no means dead and buried.[2] Amongst those who gave it a new lease on life were scores of seafarers and mathematical practitioners from the Netherlands. The Dutch, who owed much of their elementary knowledge of ocean navigation directly or indirectly (via the English and the Spaniards) to the Portuguese, more than once put the principle of finding longitude by observing variation into practice. This happened mostly on ships in the East India trade. In fact, the method was used on Dutch East Indiamen for quite a long time, although in a somewhat different version than the one proposed by João de Lisboa and Francisco Faleiro. Perhaps even more surprisingly, it was reintroduced in the middle of the 18th century after being discarded more than a century before.

The theme of this article is the rise, decline and subsequent revival of this relatively unknown navigational technique in Dutch-Asiatic shipping. First, I will describe the lifecycle itself. After that, I will look into the factors behind it.

THE INTRODUCTION OF THE METHOD INTO THE NETHERLANDS

The gist of the Portuguese method came to Dutch seafarers thanks to the efforts of two men from Flanders, who moved to the Northern Netherlands during the early phase of the Dutch Revolt. The first one was Petrus Plancius (1552-1622), a Calvinist minister from Dranouter, who also won great distinction as a cartographer and cosmographer. The second one was Simon Stevin (1548-1620), a versatile mathematical practitioner from Bruges, who rose to be a technical adviser to the States General and Stadtholder Maurice of Orange.

Plancius played a prominent part in the preparations for the first Dutch voyages to Asia. During the 1590s he was busily gathering and processing all sorts of data that could be useful for Dutch navigators on their way to Asia. Some of his material, mostly in the field of cartography, was taken from the stock of knowledge compiled by his predecessors in Flanders. But he also drew upon information from England, France, Spain and Portugal. In the manuscript sailing directions which he prepared for navigators on the expeditions sent from Amsterdam to Asia between 1595 and 1602 he included a host of data on variation in the Atlantic and Indian Oceans derived from rutters, ships' journals, travel accounts and other writings composed by foreign seafarers and cosmographers.

1. L. de Albuquerque, "Astronomical Navigation" and "Instruments for Measuring Altitude and the Art of Navigation," in A. Cortesao, *History of Portuguese Cartography*, vol. 2 (Coimbra, 1971), 221-442, p. 416-417; E. Crone, ed., *The Principal Works of Simon Stevin*, vol. III, *Navigation* (Amsterdam, 1961), 393-395.

2. For sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century criticisms see Crone (1961), 395-396; D. W. Waters, *The Art of Navigation in England in Elizabethan and Early Stuart Times* (Hartford, 1958), 144, 154, 275.

The Portuguese sources were by far the richest ones. Plancius had gained access to them by various ways; indirectly, by consulting the *Itinerario* by Jan Huyghen van Linschoten (1563-1611). Van Linschoten, a native from Enkhuizen, had been in the service of the Portuguese for over a decade. While travelling to and fro between their forts and factories in Asia and Africa, he had made numerous observations on shipping routes and trading practices and secured several priceless *roteiros* as well. Thanks to the publication of the *Itinerario* the intelligence collected by Van Linschoten became available to the Dutch seafaring public at large. The last part of the *Itinerario* (the *Reys-gheschrift*), which contained most of the data useful for navigation, was the one to appear first: in 1595, just before the departure of the first Dutch expedition to Asia.[3] Plancius had his doubts as to the reliability of some of Van Linschoten's statements, however. As a matter of fact he could also avail himself of *roteiros* and other writings procured directly from Lisbon (with the help of Cornelis de Houtman, among others). When the first Dutch fleet had returned from the East, Plancius could supplement the body of material collected from foreign sources with information gathered by Dutch seamen and he adapted the manuscript sailing directions accordingly.[4]

In addition to data on variation in many parts of the globe the sailing directions also contained an exposition on the use of variation for the determination of longitude. This exposition, entitled "Van de graden der lancte ende het affmeten der selven door het noordoosteren ende noordwesteren der naelde" (On the degrees of longitude and the measurement thereof by means of the northeasting and northwesting of the needle) gave an outline of Plancius' theory on the relationship between variation and longitude as well as some practical instructions for putting the theory into practice. The tract was issued to navigators on Dutch East Indiamen from the second expedition onwards (which departed in 1598).[5] The theory itself, however, had been devised before the first Dutch ships left for Asia. On 3 September 1594 a group of merchants from the East India trade had asked the States of Holland to grant a patent to Plancius for his method for finding latitude and longitude at sea.[6]

Plancius' line of thought on the relation between variation and longitude (as reconstructed by E. Crone and S.P. l'Honoré Naber) ran as follows.[7] He assumed the existence of four meridians on the globe where magnetic declination constantly amounted to zero. The first one (taken as the prime meridian) was supposed to run over the islands of Flores and Corvo in the Azores, the second one 60°, the third one 160° and the fourth one 260° to the East. In the intervals the variation was alternately easterly and westerly. Between 0° and 60°, for example, the needle was northeasting, between 60° and 160° northwesting etcetera; in the middle of each interval the variation reached its maximum. Between 160° and 210°, for instance, one could find increasing, between 210° and 260° decreasing easterly variation. But magnetic declination was not even along the entire length of a meridian, except of course along the four agonic lines. Variation was not only changing with longitude but also with latitude. The higher the latitude, the larger the magnetic declination. It was thus imperative to find one's latitude before one could infer one's longitude from the observed value of the variation. The accuracy of the pattern outlined above, Plancius asserted, was in large part substantiated by numerous data gathered by scholars, masters and pilots from Spain, Portugal, France, England, the Netherlands and other countries; another part had to be regarded as guesswork. As to the general law governing the pattern across the globe, Plancius hypothesized that the magnetic meridian of any place on earth and the nearest agonic line intersected at a parallel near 65°30' latitude.

Now assuming one's latitude was known and the value of the variation at a particular place at sea had been observed, Plancius reasoned, the problem of finding longitude—given the supposed relationship between longitude, latitude and variation—narrowed down to a question of spherical trigonometry. For this he devised a so-

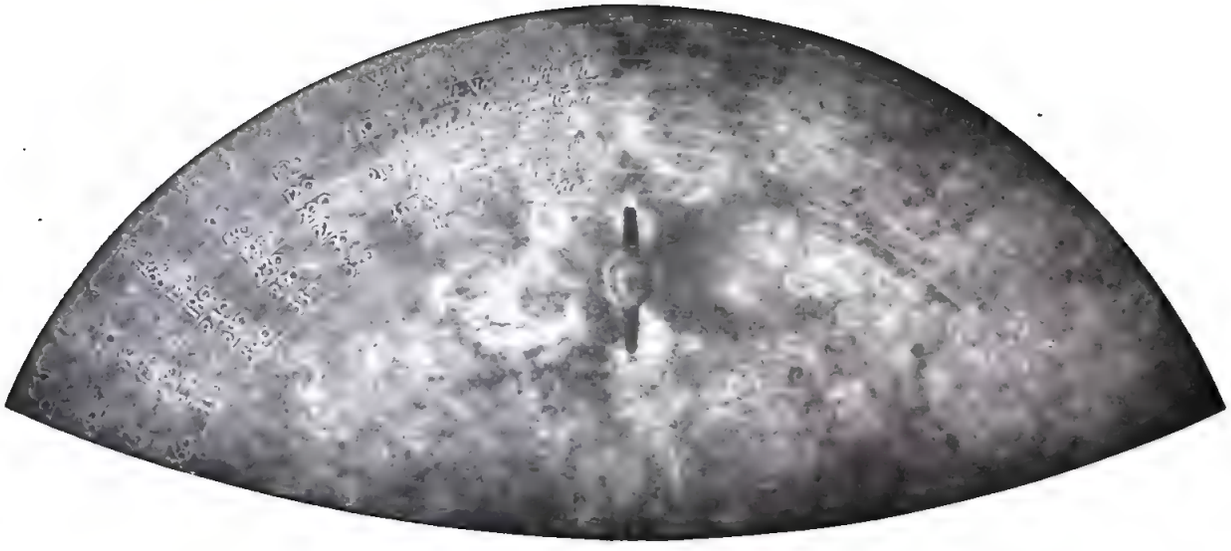
3. J. C. M. Warnsinck, ed., *Itinerario. Voyage ofte schipvaert van Jan Huygen van Linschoten naer Oost ofte Portugaels Indie, 1579-1592*, vol. 4 and 5, *Reysgeschrift van de navigatien der Portugaloyers* (The Hague, 1939); C. A. Davids, *Zeewezen en wetenschap. De wetenschap en de ontwikkeling van de navigatietechniek in Nederland tussen 1585 en 1815* (Amsterdam/Dieren, 1986), 100.

4. Davids (1986), 100, 421; Crone (1961), 400-403; J. C. M. Warnsinck, *De wetenschappelijke voorbereiding van onze eerste schipvaart naar Oost-Indië* (The Hague, 1936), 5-6, 19-21; J. Keuning, ed., *De tweede schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Cornelisz. van Neck en Wybrant Warwyck 1598-1600*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1938), lii-liv, vol. 2 (The Hague, 1940), 234-243; H. A. van Foreest and A. de Booy, eds., *De vierde schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Wilkens en Jacob van Neck (1599-1604)*, vol. 1 (The Hague, 1980), 52-53, 100-101, vol. 2 (The Hague, 1981), 182-193.

5. Keuning (1940), 229, 233-234; Foreest and De Booy (1981), 182.

6. Res. Staten van Holland, September 3, 1594, f. 347.

7. Crone (1961), 398-404, 415-417; S. P. l'Honoré Naber, ed., *Reizen van Willem Barents, Jacob van Heemskerck, Jan Cornelisz. Rijp en anderen naar het Noorden, 1594-1597*, 2 vols. (The Hague, 1917), vol. 2, xxi-xxviii, xxxi-xxxii; Crone gives a full explanation, in English, with figures.



An example of the "longitude-finder" of Petrus Plancius, left at Nova Zembla in 1596/97. This small copper disk, joined with an astrolabium catholicum, could serve to solve the problem of finding longitude by construction (see text). (Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam)

lution by construction. The construction could be carried out with the following equipment: an astrolabium catholicum (a flat circular disk on which a network of meridians and parallels in equatorio-stereographic projection was drawn), some sheets of paper on which a similar network was represented (to be applied to the astrolabium as a kind of scribbling paper) and a small flat copper plate with curved sides in the shape of the upper segment of that network (above the parallel of 65°30'), which Plancius called a "longitude-finder." On this copper plate a number of curved lines converging into a pole was engraved; these represented parts of meridians. When the "longitude-finder" was shoved to a position on the astrolabium catholicum that corresponded with the known latitude, the longitude (with respect to the nearest agonic line) could be read off at the point where the magnetic meridian of one's position at sea intersected with a meridian on the "longitude-finder ."

Simon Stevin's method can be regarded as a "softer" version of that devised by Plancius. In his treatise *De havenvinding*, published in 1599 and translated by Edward Wright as *The Haven-Finding Art* the very same year, Stevin presented a list of the variation of the needle that was almost identical with the one included in Plancius' unpublished tract "Van de graden der lancte." Plancius is explicitly named as its compiler.[8] To some extent Stevin also followed in the footsteps of the illustrious minister with his outline of the pattern of magnetic declination across the globe. He agreed as far as the decrease of variation between the prime meridian of Flores and Corvo and the agonic line of 160° East was concerned, but preferred to be less categorical on the intervals East of 160 degrees. The main difference of opinion between the two experts hinged on the *nature* of the relationship between longitude and variation. Plancius held that the relationship had already been determined and could be expressed in mathematical terms; observations on variation could thus be used to find longitude. In Stevin's view the exact relationship was still unknown. It could not be written in mathematical terms. Observations on variation were not to be regarded as a master-key for the determination of longitude, but only as an aid to haven-finding.

8. Simon Stevin, *De havenvinding* (Leiden, 1599), 8, 10-11.

The method he proposed was a simple one. Assuming seamen knew the amount of variation at their place of destination or "haven" (which Stevin supposed to be constant), they should follow the parallel at which this place was situated up to the point where the variation observed aboard was equal to that known for the place of destination. By regularly observing the variation of the needle, they could learn if they were indeed coming closer to their "haven" or not. There was no need for the use of a "longitude-finder" or astrolabium catholicum.

The Use of the Method on Dutch East-Indiamen: The Early Phase

Plancius' directions for finding longitude at sea by means of the variation of the compass were put into practice on Dutch East Indiamen rather quickly. The oldest evidence dates back to 1596/97. On May 16, 1596, two ships under command of Willem Barentsz. and Jacob van Heemskerck left the roadstead of 't Vlie bound for the East Indies. Their orders were to make their way to Asia along the coast of Russia and China instead of round the Cape of Good Hope. In fact, they only got as far as Nova Zembla. Circumstance forced the commanders and their crew to winter on the island in an improvised shed, called the "Behouden Huys." Those who survived (Van Heemskerck among them) returned to Holland in 1597. When the remnants of the "Behouden Huys" were excavated in 1871, several pieces of navigational equipment could be retrieved. Among them was an undamaged copy of Plancius' "longitude-finder."[9]

This instance of the diffusion of Plancius' method did not remain an exception. I have analyzed eleven journals of ships fitted out to Asia between the beginning of Dutch navigation to the East in 1595 and the establishment of the Dutch East-India Company (VOC) in 1602. In four of them I have come across references to the use of the method that leave no doubt as to the conviction of the pilots that they had *indeed* found longitude.[10] On the 29th of August 1598 Jacob Pietersz. noted down: "in the morning . . . I observed the magnetic declination, found 17[1]/2 degrees increasing northwesterly is 91 degrees longitude." Several days earlier Heyndrick Dirrecksen Jolinck remarked: "the 21th I had 12 degrees 53 m[inutes] variation, by which I found myself to be at 79[1]/2 degrees longitude, as is shown ("na uutwisen") by the astrolabium catholicum." Jolinck was almost jubilant. "Your best haven-finding device is to try to get a good bearing of the sun, so that you have perfect variation [with which] you may look up your longitude on your astrolabium catholicum and this added to your degree of latitude will be the finest and surest haven-finding device that you can obtain in the world."[11] During the first decade of the VOC's existence many masters and mates probably had as much confidence in the technique propagated by the clergyman-cartographer as Heyndrick Jolinck. Although there are too few ships' journals left to furnish cast-iron proof, a number of experts give us eloquent testimony of the fact. Barent Evertsz. Keteltas, a leading mathematical practitioner of the day, declared in 1609 that many pilots in the East India trade had followed Plancius' guidelines and had found that the world indeed enclosed eight intervals of variation, just like the master had told them. His colleague Jan van den Brouck, author of one of the first Dutch textbooks on the art of navigation, stated in the same year that "many a pilot, coming from the East-Indies, had avowed to have found his longitude thanks to such directions."[12]

But there were quite a few cartographers and cosmographers who struck a more sceptical note. Jodocus Hondius, Willem Jansz. Blaeu, Aelbert Haeyen and Robbert Robbertsz. held the same point of view as João de Castro in Portugal. They denied that longitude could ever be found by means of the variation of the compass. Robbertsz. asserted that this point had already been proven by the findings of Jacob van Heemskerck. It was Robbertsz. himself who had asked Van Heemskerck to put Plancius' method to the test. And the method had been found wanting. Aelbert Haeyen accused Plancius of having extorted data on variation from pilots who had sailed on the second expedition to the East-Indies in 1598/99; in retort, they had deliberately provided him with false information. The method had in fact been completely useless.[13]

Until recently, it used to be thought that the critics gained the upper hand soon after 1611.[14] In that year

9. l'Honoré Naber, vol. 1, 47, vol. 2, xxiv-xxv; E. Crone "De vondst op Nova Zembla. Een hernieuwd onderzoek der navigatie-instrumenten," *Bulletin Rijksmuseum*, 14 (1966), 71-85.

10. Davids (1986), 74-75.

11. J. Keuning, ed., *De tweede schipvaart der Nederlanders naar Oost-Indië onder Jacob Cornelisz. van Neck en Wybrant Warwyck 1598-1600*, vol. II, (The Hague, 1940), 139, vol. V part 1 (The Hague, 1947), 49-50.

12. Barent Evertsz. Keteltas, *Het ghebruyck der naeld-wijsinge* (Amsterdam, 1609), Dedication to Prince Maurice and the Board of Admiralty, Jan van den Brouck, *Instructie der zeevaert* (Rotterdam, 1609), 37.

13. Davids (1986), 76-77.

14. Crone (1961), 406.

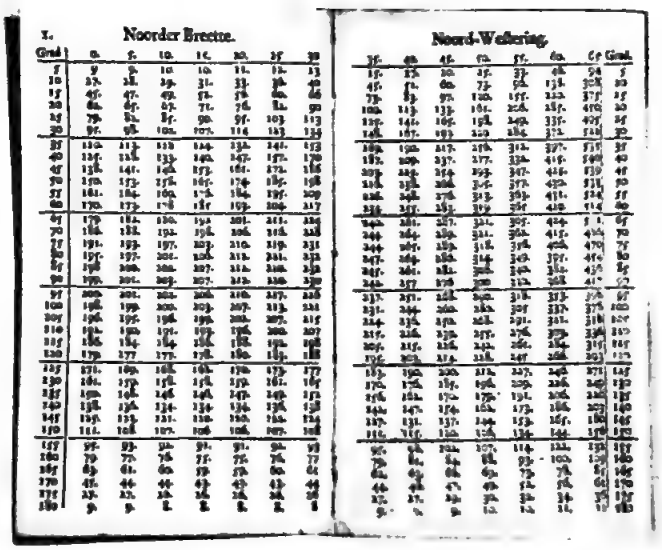
another expedition left the port of Amsterdam to explore the northern route to Asia. This one took place under the aegis of the Admiralty of Amsterdam. The man in charge, master Jan Cornelisz. May from Hoorn, again tried to put Plancius' solution to the problem of longitude into practice. On the third of July he discovered a disconcerting fact—disconcerting, that is, for the followers of Plancius. "That afternoon we had a latitude of 75 degrees and 20 minutes . . . ; here was an increasingly westerly variation of about 16 to 17 degrees which struck me as odd, because it was supposed to be two or three, according to the astrolabium catholicum and longitude-finder." And he concluded: "from which it appears that the rule is imperfect and totally frivolous."[15]

It was not defeated overnight, however. In the ship's journal of the East Indiaman *'t Wapen van Amsterdam*, kept by Pieter Harmanssen, the entry on 26 May 1614 reads: "we took a bearing of the setting of the sun and found that we had a magnetic declination of 11 degrees and a quarter, increasing westerly, and that showed us with the small disc on the astrolabium catholicum that we were exactly at 77 degrees longitude." The Chamber of Hoorn of the VOC bought a "koperen platje" (small copper disk) with an astrolabium catholicum as part of the equipment for its ships as late as 1619.[16] After 1620 such indications for the use of Plancius' method are lacking. But the idea that longitude and variation were somehow related was not renounced for at least another decade and a half. In the journal of the East Indiaman *Zierikzee*, for example, one comes across the following entry on 3 April 1620: "the compasses showed us that we had passed the Cape of Good Hope, While we ought to have found easterly variation we found westerly variation." And in the journal of the *Amsterdam* on 1 February 1635 one finds the author expresses his surprise at having observed an easterly variation of one degree "because the compasses should have shown no variation at all near the islands, which led us to suspect that we were closer to the coast of Barbary than we had estimated."[17]

It seems that the navigators on Dutch East-Indiamen for some time still clung to a "softer" version of the old hypothesis on the relationship between longitude and variation—Stevin's one rather than the one formulated by Plancius. But this custom did not last. Between 1635 and about 1740 I have discovered only a single case that might serve as evidence for the use of variation to estimate longitude. And that was clearly an exception. Robert Padtbrugge, who sailed as merchant in the service of the VOC to Asia aboard the *Sparendam* in 1670/71, noted down in his travel account on 7 April 1671 that the navigators had observed a variation of 20 degrees westerly. The merchant himself concluded—in the same vein as many seamen before 1635—that the true position of the ship was more to the East than the navigators had estimated. However, the mates would have none of it, Padtbrugge noticed: "they preferred to rely more on their dead reckoning than on this large variation."[18]

The Use of the Method on Dutch East-Indiamen: The Latter Phase

The revival of the method started about 1740. In 1738 the then examiner of pilots of the Chamber Delft of the VOC, Nicolaas Samuel Cruquius, published a booklet entitled *Tegenwoordige miswijsing der compassen rondom*



A table from *Tegenwoordige miswijsing der compassen rondom den aardbol* by Nicolaas Samuel Cruquius (1738), which gives the values of magnetic declination for every five degrees of longitude up to 180° (column on the left) and for every five degrees of latitude up to 65° North (row at the top). (Universiteitsbibliotheek, Leiden)

15. S. Muller, ed., *De reis van Jan Cornelisz. May naar de IJszee en de Amerikaansche kust 1611-1612* (The Hague, 1909), 16.
16. Davids (1986), 75, 77.
17. Algemeen Rijksarchief, The Hague (ARA), Collectie Wollebrand Geleynssen de Jongh, nr. 309, journal *Zierikzee*, April 3, 1620, nr. 75, journal *Amsterdam*, February 1, 1635.
18. ARA, Archief Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC), nr. 5053, journal Robertus Padtbrugge, April 7, 1671.

den aardbol. It consisted for the greater part of a series of tables which gave magnetic declination for every five degrees longitude and every five degrees latitude (up to 65 degrees North and 65 degrees South). The purpose of the tables was twofold, Cruquius explained: to find the variation if latitude and longitude were known, or to find longitude if latitude and variation were known.[19] However, the author was at pains to emphasize the provisional nature of the data. In a lengthy subtitle he included a clear warning. The tables were submitted "on trial" to the masters and mates in the East India trade, to be used "cautiously" "in case of need," to be compared with their "precise daily bearings" and to be "corrected with care" in order that "if possible" navigation "at least in this important respect" could be made slightly more secure. Cruquius' claims were obviously far more modest than those once put forward by Plancius.

When the standard sailing directions for East Indiamen were subjected to a substantial revision in 1742, the section on the crossing of the equator was extended with the following passage: "it has been found by competent seamen that as long as one observes westerly variation one can be sure to have space enough to keep steering to South West, but if one gets more than one degree easterly variation and a number of successive, good thrustworthy bearings, and one has not yet reached Cape Augustine one has to be on guard, but as soon as one has passed that latitude one can sail on in spite of such low bearings."[20] The variation of the compass, combined with the latitude, was thus suggested as a rough market of the distance to the Brazilian coast.

With the next revision of the sailing directions, completed in 1768, the significance of data on magnetic declination was stressed in no uncertain terms. At various places along the route to Asia, it was stated, the variation of the compass-needle might be used as an indicator for longitude (assuming latitude was known).

This applied above all to the crossing of the equator. In the charts issued by the VOC a number of oblique lines, drawn at some distance apart, between the coasts of Africa and South America designated the so-called "cart-track," i.e. the track that one had to follow (coming from the North) in order to avoid being driven either onto the shores of Brazil or Guyana or into the doldrums

19. Nicolaas Cruquius, *Tegenwoordige miswysing der compassen rondom den aardbol* (Haarlem, 1738), "Voornaamste gebruik van deze tafelen."

20. ARA VOC nr. 123 res. Heren XVII August 28, 1742.

A chart of the South Atlantic by Isaac de Graaf used on ships of the Dutch East-India Company (1738). The oblique, black lines between Guinea and Brazil mark the so-called "cart-track"—the ideal route for East-Indiamen when crossing the equator. (Rijksmuseum Nederlands Historisch Scheepvaartmuseum, Amsterdam)

in the Gulf of Guinea. Now the variation of the compass could serve as a sign to inform navigators if they were indeed "on track." "In order to ascertain in some measure . . . if you find yourself within the bounds of the cart-track when you have approached the equator to within one or two degrees," the sailing directions read, "you should know that this can be learned from the variation of the compass if the observations of the sun are taken accurately and with good instruments; for one or two degrees to the north as well as below the equator, between 356 to 359 degrees longitude, magnetic declination is now found to be amount to 5 to 7 degrees westerly." East of 359° the westerly variation increased, West of 356° it diminished, until it changed into easterly variation round about 356° longitude. Other points along the route to Asia where the same principle could be used with profit were the Cape of Good Hope and the isles of

St. Paul and Amsterdam, which served as landmarks for East Indiamen on the track between the Cape and Java. The relevant sections of the sailing directions did not undergo any further alterations during the rest of the existence of the VOC as an active shipping agency, except for some minor changes in the degree of variation mentioned.[21]

There can be no doubt that these suggestions were put into practice, too, at least from the late sixties onwards. The naval officer Johan Splinter Stavorinus, who for a while acted as master of a Dutch East Indiaman, remarked in the account of his first voyage to the Indies in 1768 that the "variation of the compass is the easiest, and almost the surest rule that is observed by our navigators, to arrive at the Cape, and to determine the longitude they are in . . . . If the instrument be correct, and the observation accurate, the variation of the compass may be depended upon."[22] Stavorinus used the technique himself. And many other navigators of the VOC did so, too, as ships' journals attest. It was not until the late 1780s that another, more exact method for finding longitude at sea was adopted aboard Dutch East-Indiamen: the determination of longitude by lunar distances.[23]

The Background

The popularity of magnetic declination as a means for longitude-finding from the mid-1590s onwards was not as anomalous as it may seem at first sight. During the early phase of ocean shipping the Dutch were far more receptive to foreign influence in the field of navigation technology than in the century before or in the century and a half that followed. Almost any technique or instrument employed by the Portuguese, Spaniards or English could arouse the interest of Dutch seafarers and nautical experts. Anything could be valuable. The use of variation for the determination of longitude was only one of the many scraps of knowledge borrowed from foreign sources and made serviceable for Dutch shipping. The interest in innovation was not restricted to products from abroad. In the Netherlands, just as in England, there was an outburst of inventive activity in navigation technology at the turn of the century. The supply of inventions ranged from new devices or techniques in cartography to new altitude-measuring instruments and new methods for the determination of longitude.[24] The search for solutions to the problem of longitude, which engaged a number of Dutch inventors in the nineties, received an additional boost by the decision of the States General and the States of Holland in 1600 and 1601, respectively, to put up a large reward. Not a few of the inventions have actually been tried at sea.[25] The use of magnetic declination for the finding of longitude can thus be understood as part of a general tendency during the early phase of Dutch expansion to experiment with almost any promising new device in the art of navigation.

The fact that the method fell into disuse on Dutch East Indiamen cannot be interpreted as a result of some crucial experiment that had patently exposed its flaws. Had Plancius' "longitude-finder" not been held in esteem for at least eight years *after* Jan Cornelisz. May had made his scathing remarks on the merits of the underlying theory? Had the "softer" version of the method not remained in use at sea until at least the middle of the 1630s? The eclipse can better be explained as the outcome of a series of reverses than as the result of a single knock-out blow. In the Dutch East India trade observations of the variation were part and parcel of the navigational practice from the start. In thirty out of thirty-eight extant ships' journals of Dutch East-Indiamen from 1595 to 1644 I analysed a reference to such observations can be found.[26] The number of ships departing to or returning from Asia considerably waxed in the early decades of the 17th century. Whereas between 1602 and 1610 seventy-six vessels left Dutch ports for destinations in the East (and forty-four returned), the number of departures in the period 1630-1640 amounted to 157 and the number of returns to seventy-five.[27] The quantity of data on variation in the Indian and Atlantic Oceans gathered by Dutch seafarers must have increased accordingly. The information was, at least in part, carefully stored. From 1617 onwards all journals of ships fitted out by the Chamber Amsterdam had to be handed in to the cartographer of the VOC in order to be used for the improvement and completion of charts and rutters. This position was held at the time by Hessel Gerritsz. . In 1633 it passed into the hands of

21. ARA VOC nr. 5036 "Verbeeterde instructie van de eygenschap der winden en de coursen te houden in het vaarwater tusschen Nederland en Java" (Amsterdam, 1768), 8-9; Davids (1986), 193, 196.

22. J. S. Stavorinus, *Voyages to the East-Indies*, vol. 1 (London, 1798), 26-27.

23. Davids (1986), 189-191.

24. C. A. Davids, "Dutch Contributions to the Development of Navigation Technology in the 17th Century," *1688. The Seaborne Alliance and Diplomatic Revolution* (Greenwich, 1989), 59-74.

25. Davids (1986), 69-74, 80-85, 129-141.

26. Davids (1986), 77.

27. F. S. Gaastra, *De geschiedenis van de VOC* (Busseum, 1982), 105.

Willem Jansz. Blaeu, who was succeeded by his son Joan five years later.[28]

As the stockpile of information on large areas in the world was growing, it must have become obvious to anyone involved that the neat, mathematical relationship between variation and longitude hypothesized by Plancius on the base of a limited set of data did not square with the mass of newly observed facts. Plancius himself could no longer contest this conclusion. He died in 1622. The reason why the "softer" version of the method no longer inspired any confidence either was probably the discovery of the secular change of variation.[29] The disclosure by Henry Gellibrand in 1635 that the magnetic declination at the same place on earth was not invariable but changed with time dealt another blow to the assumption that the variation of the compass could serve to determine longitude. Data on variation proved to be as reliable as quicksand. Gellibrand's finding was soon accepted by leading experts within the VOC. When the directors of the Chamber Amsterdam in 1647 via the States General received another purported solution for the problem of finding longitude at sea based on the hypothesis that magnetic declination at a given place was a constant quantity, they rejected the proposal on the advice of the examiner of pilots Cornelis Jansz. Lastman and the cartographer of the VOC Joan Blaeu as well as an external expert, the well-known mathematical practitioner Sybrand Hansz. Cardinael. Their argument was "that the variation was not always the same but subject to change, as can be clearly seen from the observations made in our country by our supreme pilot [Lastman] and others in England." That insight was included in the *Instructie van de naelden* (Instruction on the compass-needles) issued to all masters and pilots shortly afterwards.[30]

If the method was discarded about 1635, why did it return to favor nearly a century later? Knowledge on variation had meanwhile expanded still further. Although the laws governing the earth's magnetism were not yet fully understood, the pattern of magnetic declination across the globe was gradually getting clearer. In 1701 and 1702 Edmond Halley first published charts of the variation of the compass that incorporated isogonic lines. In his explanatory notes Halley pointed out that these charts could not only be useful for rectifying courses indicated by the compass to true courses but also for estimating longitude in places where the isogonic lines ran almost parallel to a meridian. However, seafarers should bear in mind that magnetic declination was slowly changing with time and isogonic charts thus were regularly in need of revision, he warned.[31] Halley himself did not bring his charts up to date. That task has first been accomplished by Charles Leadbetter and later by James Dodson and William Mountaine. The first edition of Dodson and Mountaine's world chart of magnetic declination came out in 1744, the second one, based on more than 50,000 observations of the variation, appeared in 1758. In addition they published a chart of magnetic declination in the Atlantic. By then, similar charts were being produced in other countries as well.[32]

Although Nicolaas Cruquius did not refer to either Halley's or any other world map of magnetic declination in his *Tegenwoordige miswijsing* it can hardly be assumed that he was unaware of their existence. Cruquius, born in 1678, was a man of great talents. He began his career as a surveyor. In 1725 he was appointed examiner of pilots at the Chamber Delft of the VOC. In addition, he held the important office of inspector at the drainage-board Rijnland from 1733 until his death in 1754. He proved himself not only an able hydraulic engineer and cartographer (whose advice was much sought after), but also a meticulous and even passionate observer of meteorological, astronomical and other kinds of natural phenomena; he bought a large set of instruments himself. He studied medicine at the university of Leiden (but did not graduate); Boerhaave was one of his teachers.[33] In 1724, he was elected Fellow of the Royal Society[34] and in the 1730s he enrolled in the local scientific society in Haarlem, the *Natuurkundig College*.[35]

28. G. Schilder, "Organization and Development of the Hydrographic Office of the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century," *Imago Mundi*, 28 (1976), 61-78, p. 62; F. W. Stapel and C. W. Th. baron van Boetzelaer van Asperen en Dubbeldam, eds., *Pieter van Dam. Beschryvinge van de Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 1, part I (The Hague, 1976 (2)), 414.

29. Davids (1986), 79; see also Waters (1958), 238.

30. Davids (1986), 79, 418.

31. N. J. W. Thrower, ed., *The Three Voyages of Edmond Halley in the Paramore 1698-1701*, 2 vols. (London, 1980), 35-41, 56-60, Appendix D, 365-367.

32. Thrower, ed., 368-369; H. L. Hitchins and W. E. May, *From Lodestone to Gyro-compass* (London, 1955), 46-48; E. Crone, *Cornelis Douwes 1712-1773. Zijn leven en werk* (Haarlem, 1941), 11-12.

33. A. F. V. van Engelen and H. A. M. Geurts, *Nicolaus Cruquius (1678-1754) and his meteorological observations* (De Bilt,1985); Davids (1986), 400; University Library Leyden, Archief Senaat nr. 13, March 28, 1716.

34. Archive Royal Society, Journal-Book XII f.341 February 6, 1723 (O.S.) and f.446 March 12, 1723 (O.S.).

35. B. G. Sliggers, "Honderd jaar natuurkundige amateurs te Haarlem," in A. Wiechmann and L. C. Palm, eds., *Een elektriserend geleerde. Martinus van Marum 1750-1837* (Haarlem, 1987), 67-103, p. 76-77.

Cruquius' acquaintance with developments in science and his keen interest in observations—in conjunction with his professional concern for the advancement of navigation—must have focused his attention on the possible use of magnetic declination for finding longitude in the sense suggested by Halley. It is perhaps no coincidence that in 1729 he reintroduced into hydrographic mapping a technique similar to Halley's isogonic lines: the use of contour lines, or "isobaths," to represent areas of equal depths.[36] His plea for a reconsideration of variation as an aid to longitude finding may have been instrumental to the inclusion of the relevant passage in the sailing directions of the VOC laid down in 1742. Cruquius' voice alone probably did not count enough to bring about an even further revaluation. The Chamber Delft, where he held the office of examiner of pilots, was after all one of the smallest chambers of the VOC. In hydrographic mapping in the Netherlands his influence was restricted, too; the use of isobaths did not become a widespread practice until a century later.

By the 1760s things had changed, however. Charts of magnetic declination had become more widely known. In 1745, for example, a copy of Halley's world-chart was included in the Dutch edition of Louis Renard's atlas, the *Atlas van zeevaart en koophandel* (dedicated to the Directors and Advocates of the VOC). In 1752 a new variation chart appeared, made by Nicolaas van Ewijk. The year 1760 saw the publication of another edition of the world-chart by Mountaine and Dodson with an explanatory note in Dutch. On the direct route between the Netherlands and South America the use of these maps as reference sources on magnetic declination (not as aids to longitude finding) seems to have increased after the 1750s to such an extent that seamen almost completely dispensed with observations of variation.[37] It is known that they were utilized in the East India trade as well, at least during the final years of the VOC. On 3 January 1788 the *Heren XVII* decided to provide each ship with three or four charts of magnetic declination. They had to be the "latest English ones."[38]

When the sailing directions came up for a thorough revision in the middle of the sixties there was a broad consensus among the examiners of pilots of the VOC as to the use of variation for the determination of longitude. The main reason for the overhaul was the change in variation which had rendered the wording of the existing sailing directions out of date. Six out of the nine amendments proposed by the originators of the revision—the examiners at the Chamber Amsterdam, Pybo Steenstra and Jan de Boer—related to the matter of variation. Their proposals were partly based on their own experience (Jan de Boer had been master of an East Indiaman himself), partly on an analysis of thirty-four recent ships' journals kept in the archives of the VOC. The protracted debates between the examiners on the rewording of the sailing directions did not focus on the question *if*, but *how* magnetic declination should be used as a measure for determining longitude.[39]

There were differences of opinion on the value of the variation at particular places as well as on the degree of predictability. One of the examiners, Meindert Semeyns from the Chamber Enkhuizen (1694-1775), had pinned his faith on a theory of his own making which allowed him—so he said—to predict the variation of the compass for every place of earth at any point in time; thanks to his discovery of the laws of the "magnetic system," the problem of longitude had been "solved." This solution, first presented to the States General in 1755, had already given cause for an acrimonious debate between Semeyns and a professor of physics, astronomy and philosophy at the University of Leiden, Johan Lulofs (1711-1768), who would have none of it.[40] The controversy aroused such interest at the time that in 1765 and 1768 two Ph.D. candidates in Lulofs' faculty added a thesis to their dissertation saying that true longitude at sea could as yet not be inferred from magnetic declination.[41]

Semeyns' claims were neither acknowledged by his colleagues nor by the directors of the VOC. The final version of the sailing directions, from which I quoted above, was cast in suggestive rather than emphatic terms. In fact, it dovetailed with the view of Pybo Steenstra (1731-1788).[42] When Steenstra as reader in mathematics, astronomy and the art of navigation at the Athenaeum Illustre of Amsterdam during the winter of 1769 dealt

36. J. W. Konvitz, *Cartography in France 1660-1848: Science, Engineering and Statecraft* (Chicago, 1987), 68.
37. Davids (1986), 206-207.
38. Davids (1986), 196.
39. Davids (1986), 193-194.
40. Davids (1986), 194-195, 437; D. Bierens de Haan, "Een Leidsch hoogleraar en een Enkhuizer natuurkundige in de vorige eeuw," *Album der Natuur*, 1872, 242-246; Meindert Semeyns, *Het nieuw ontdekte magneetische systema, rakende den loop van den aardbol* (Enkhuizen, 1767).
41. Henricus Vink, *Specimen mathematico-physicum inaugurale de percussione fluidorum* (Leyden, 1765), thesis V; Eduardus Spry, *Disputatio inauguralis philosophica de adscensus variorum causis* (Leyden, 1768), thesis XXXII.
42. Davids (1986), 195.

with the determination of longitude, he maintained that the best and most convenient method for finding longitude at sea was observing the variation of the needle. But he made this crucial reservation: at least on those latitudes where for each degree of longitude a significant change of variation could be perceived. These changes could not be predicted. The laws that governed magnetic declination, he stated, laid still hid in night. There was no alternative left but to rely on experience.[43] And Steenstra wielded far more power than Semeyns. From 1763 until his death in 1788 he held the most important position in the field of navigation technology within the VOC-bureaucracy: examiner of masters and pilots in the theory of navigation at the Chamber Amsterdam.[44]

Conclusion

The use of magnetic declination for determining longitude at sea is nowadays considered an unreliable and redundant technique. Still, it has been practised in the past. At times it even received official backing.

In this contribution I have shown how the technique was introduced, discarded and reintroduced on ships of the Dutch East India Company. All the critical decisions turned out to be rational responses to changes in the needs of the shipping business or in the supply of knowledge.

As the range of Dutch shipping suddenly expanded at the end of the 16th century, it was rational for seamen to try every available means for determining their position at sea, the method of finding longitude by observing the variation of the needle included. When a growing mass of data on variation sapped the credibility of one version after another, it was sound again to renounce the technique altogether, at least for the time being. It was no less sensible to retrace one's steps when advances in knowledge made the use of variation for finding longitude in a way feasible once more, whereas other, potentially more accurate methods for determining longitude were not yet fully applicable. And each of the crucial decisions could to some extent be accredited to the influence of technical advisers of the VOC or its predecessors.

43. Pybo Steenstra, *Openbaare lessen over het vinden der lengte op zee* (Amsterdam, 1770), 42, 45-46.
44. Davids (1986), 399.

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"Splice the Mainbrace": The Story of a Naval Epic

MALCOLM H. MURFETT

ON the morning of Wednesday 20 April 1949, HMS *Amethyst*, a small British frigate, was making her way up the Yangtse river to relieve the destroyer, HMS *Consort*, as the Nanking guardship when she was shelled and badly damaged by Chinese Communist batteries some 60 miles north east of her intended destination.[1] She ran aground onto a mudbank and was strafed for 90 minutes. By the time the artillery troops of the Peoples Liberation Army (PLA) called off their attack, *Amethyst* had suffered severe casualties.[2] Despite the fact that the PLA did not press home their initial advantage for the rest of the day, *Amethyst* remained in a virtually defenseless position for the next 15 hours.

Although her circumstances appeared to have improved substantially once she had managed to refloat herself and could actually move on the river under her own steam, it soon became obvious that the frigate's freedom was quite drastically circumscribed by forces beyond her control. By nightfall on 21 April, the PLA gun crews in the vicinity of Rose Island had succeeded in driving off the cruiser *London* and frigate *Black Swan* sent by the British naval authorities on the Far East Station to rescue the *Amethyst*. Such was the scale of damage and loss wrought by the Communist batteries on the British vessels that no further naval rescue mission was contemplated.[3] Shortly afterwards the PLA secured another significant victory over the British by foiling an attempt to airlift injured survivors of the original attack off the *Amethyst*.[4]

Thereafter, the *Amethyst* and her crew became virtual prisoners of the PLA—a state of detention which lasted for the next 101 days while talks were being conducted ashore in an effort to arrange the release of the British vessel and her crew. A point was reached at the end of July, however, when Lieutenant Commander John Simon Kerans, the captain of the frigate, decided that these negotiations were not going to work and that the Communists were merely stalling for time realizing that conditions on board ship were fast becoming intolerable. Once he had come to this conclusion, Kerans began to consider staging an escape from the *Amethyst's* anchorage on the river. He felt that anything was preferable to an indefinite period of confinement on the Yangtse in what had become an evil-smelling, rat-infested and disease-ridden boat at the height of an oppressively hot and humid summer.[5]

Quite apart from the moral support he had received in the recent past from Admiral Brind, the commander-in-chief of the Far East Station in Singapore, Kerans felt that with Colonel Kang, the main PLA negotiator, still in Nanking and Communist vigilance in the vicinity of the anchorage perhaps not what it ought to have been, the time had finally arrived for the *Amethyst* to try and steal

1. HMS *Amethyst* was a frigate of the modified *Black Swan* class. She had been built on Clydeside and completed on 2 November 1943. At 1430 tons deadweight and nearly 300 feet in length, *Amethyst* was designed to carry a full complement of 192 men. She had been used initially during the war as an escort on convoy runs and had achieved a certain distinction by being involved in the stalking and destruction of two German submarines, *U-483*, on 6 January 1945 and *U-1208* on 20 February 1945. She had also been responsible, along with the sloop HMS *Magpie*, for bringing the *U-249* into Portland on 9 May 1945, after the submarine had surrended off the Cornish coast with her crew of four officers and forty three ratings. Once the European phase of the Second World War had been concluded, *Amethyst* had been sent to the Far East. After being present at the surrender of Japanese forces at Rabaul in New Guinea on 25 August 1945, she had remained east of Suez for the post-war period. 69/45/1, Imperial War Museum, London (hereafter I.W.M.); *Illustrated London News*, 26 Nov. 1949, pp. 823-24.

2. *Amethyst* lost 22 men killed, 1 missing and 31 wounded as a result of this action. One of the men killed was a local Chinese river pilot. HMS *Amethyst*'s Final Report on Yangtse Incident (hereafter *Amethyst* Report), 22 May 1950, M0118/50, p. 21, Public Record Office (hereafter P.R.O.) ADM 1/21851/50.

3. Malcolm H. Murfett, "What a Difference a Day Makes: The Royal Navy and the Yangtse Incident of 20-21 April 1949," *The American Neptune*, vol. XLIX, no. 3 (Summer 1989), pp. 208-25.

4. *Amethyst* Report, p. 27; *Amethyst* to Flag Officer Second in Command Far East Station (hereafter FO 2 i/c FES), 211122Z, 21 Apr. 1949, F5852/1219/10, FO 371/75888; Lawrence Earl, *Yangtse Incident* (London, 1973), pp. 69-71.

5. *Amethyst* Report, p. 61. According to Wilkinson, when Kerans decided to make his escape bid, there was only 47.3 tons of fuel remaining on board the *Amethyst*. 'Engineering Exploits,' p. 423, *Amethyst* Scrapbook, II, Kerans 69/45/1, I.W.M.

away from her mooring on the Yangtse. He knew that in order to do so, the night would have to be as black as possible with little or no moonlight. It just so happened that the moon was due to set at 11:15 p.m. on Saturday 30 July.[6] He hoped that in the dead of night the PLA artillery would not be able to spot the moving figure of the *Amethyst*, or hit her even if they could see her. Far from simply banking on the poor eyesight or indiscipline of the PLA troops, though these would be contributory factors in any successful escape bid, Kerans imagined that the Communists were having to overcome certain practical problems which had been created by the intensity of the recent storms in the area. He knew from conversations his crew had had with the local food suppliers that typhoon *Gloria*, which had struck the Yangtse basin on 25 July, had caused severe flooding along much of the lower river valley. It was reasonable to assume, therefore, that this flooding would have forced the PLA to relocate their battery positions from the river banks to drier areas further inshore. If so, the further inland they had to go to get to dry land, the greater the odds became that the *Amethyst* might be able to slip past them undetected and unharmed.[7]

According to his official report, Kerans claimed that he finally reached his decision to make a run for it at 3:00 p.m. on Saturday 30 July.[8] Once he had resolved to go, he knew that he would have to do something about improving the vulnerable position of his hard working Chinese translator Sam Leo, whose family lived in Nanking and were at risk should he be implicated in the plot to escape. Kerans decided to dispense with his services and devised a scheme for getting him off the ship before the crew were ordered to begin making last minute preparations for the break-out later that evening. Leo, who had worked enthusiastically and outstandingly for Kerans in the past few weeks, was now put ashore by the captain with a letter for Colonel Kang requesting permission for the interpreter to travel to the Stevenson Mission Hospital in Chinkiang in order to obtain urgent medical supplies that were desperately needed on board the *Amethyst*.[9] Kerans did not tell Leo anything about the escape bid and the translator left the ship in total ignorance of what was being planned. It was a callous thing for Kerans to have done, since it was repaying a loyal employee with certain incarceration. Leo only found that something was dreadfully amiss when he was arrested on his way back to Nanking and charged with complicity in the escape. His innocence did not prevent an irate Kang from dealing severely with him, regardless of whether his alibi was plausible or not.[10] Referring to this later, Kerans noted laconically:

> I much regret having taken this course, but obviously I could not bring him into my confidence and his reactions might have jeopardised the whole operation. It was one man's life against the rest of us on board.[11]

Although the captain claimed that he was trying to do Leo a favor by not including him in his plans, he was unable to do the same for the other eight Chinese members of the crew on board, men whose reliability was, he thought, far more suspect than that of the faithful and dependable translator. He decided that they should be

6. *Amethyst* Report, p. 62. Strangely enough in an undated and unsigned memo, presumably from the Admiralty's naval information department, recording local conditions on the night of the escape for the benefit of newspaper editors, the moon was given as setting at 0018 hours and not 2315 as the *Amethyst* Report suggests. P.R.O. ADM 116/5707.

7. *Amethyst* Report, pp. 62-3. In the event the river level was 12 feet above normal at Chinkiang and an extra 3 feet in the lower reaches of the Yangtse. P.R.O. ADM 116/5707.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 61.

9. In a message to the naval attaché in Nanking on 9 August, Kerans indicates that Dr. Fearnley, the R.A.F. medical officer on board the *Amethyst*, was in on the scheme to keep Leo ashore and had supported his captain's letter with a list of the medical supplies required by the ship. Leo was told to remain in Chinkiang overnight in order that he might see Colonel Kang early the next day (31 July) to inform him that the frigate was running dangerously short of fuel and that more oil was desperately needed from Shanghai if the ship was to continue functioning. *Amethyst* to N.A. Nanking, 090515Z, 9 Aug. 1949, F12026/1219/10, FO 371/75896.

10. As expected, the Chinese Communists reacted to the escape with the utmost ferocity. Sam Leo was immediately taken into custody in Chinkiang and transferred to Nanking handcuffed and in leg irons on the day after the escape. Although he was repeatedly interrogated and threatened with death for allegedly conspiring with the enemy, the Communists must have eventually come to believe that he was innocent because he was finally released from incarceration after 79 days on 18 October 1949. After considering the matter for more than two months, the British authorities decided to pay him £1000 compensation for the trouble he had endured on their behalf. Unfortunately, the matter did not end there since the Communists insisted that Leo should resign from the staff of the British embassy and work for them instead. Stevenson to F.O., 1244, 16 Aug. 1949; 1258, 17 Aug. 1949, F12191/1219/10; 1268, 18 Aug. 1949, F12346/1219/10; 1317, 23 Aug. 1949, F12596/1219/10, FO 371/75896; 1409, 5 Sept. 1949, F13415/1219/10, FO 371/75897. See also Hutchinson (Nanking) to F.O., 1772, 20 Oct. 1949, F13415/1219/10; 1949, 21 Nov. 1949, F17449/1219/10, FO 371/75897. P.M. Scarlett (F.O.) to Cardo (Adm.), 3 Dec. 1949; Minute by Scarlett, 6 Dec. 1949, F18109/1219/10, FO 371/75897. F.O. to Nanking, 44, 5 Jan. 1950, F18109/1219/10, FO 371/75897.

11. *Amethyst* Report, p. 63. Leo was in an unusually vulnerable position because he was employed as an interpreter/translator by the British embassy in Nanking. His situation, already complicated by this connection, was worsened by the fact that one of his two sons was in the KMT navy and the other was in the Nationalist army somewhere in the area of Canton. *Amethyst* to N.A. Nanking, 090515Z, 9 Aug. 1949, F12026/1219/10, FO 371/75896.

Commander John Simon Kerans (courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery, London).

kept under surveillance at all times and remain ignorant of his intention to escape until the ship was on its way; some, in fact, were locked down below decks to ensure that even if they heard what was afoot they would be unable to warn anyone on shore of the planned action. This was a sensible precaution and infinitely preferable to the drastic solution of "eliminating them" which Kerans later admitted he had contemplated if they had threatened to ruin the operation by alerting the PLA troops ashore to unusual activity on the frigate.[12]

Once he had reached a decision, Kerans called for Lieutenant-Commander George Strain.[13] After telling him of his intention to escape, the captain needed to spend little time in convincing the electrical officer that there was basically no effective alternative to that of making a run for it.[14] Both men knew that the vessel's damage repair team had done sterling work throughout the ship since the initial attack in April and had endeavored to patch up the ship and make her seaworthy once more. Undoubtedly the most effective repair work had been performed in the engine room where Leonard Williams and his men had managed to overhaul the turbines and replace virtually all the defective pieces of equipment during the frigate's prolonged stay on the Yangtse. This was a vitally important consideration to Kerans, for the *Amethyst* could not afford to have her engines working at anything less than full capacity for the entire duration of the passage downriver towards Shanghai. In simple terms it came down to this: if the engines could not provide such a service for an unbroken stretch of roughly eight to nine hours, the escape bid would be as good as over before it started. Kerans and Strain both realized this fact, but pinned their faith on their engineers and hoped that this confidence in their men would be rewarded by a trouble free passage down the Yangtse.[15]

Once convinced of the soundness of the engines, the two men began encrypting the message which the *Amethyst* would send to Admiral Brind by flash procedure using the one-time pad code which had been recently devised by the Far East Station and built up in conjunction with those on board the frigate. It said simply: "TOP SECRET. I AM GOING TO TRY AND BREAK OUT 2200 I (R) 2200 I TONIGHT 30TH. JULY. CONCORD SET WATCH 8290."[16] It was almost 4:00 p.m. by the time the message had been patiently encrypted and sent off.

This was not the first occasion on which the special code was used. Brind had already sent two messages in it; the first was during the night of 25 July when typhoon *Gloria* was raging along the Yangtse. In that message he disclosed the fact that in the past his advice on how to cope with freak weather conditions had been merely a cover for supporting any plan of escape which Kerans might devise.[17] Brind used the same procedure three days

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12. *Amethyst* Report, p. 65. In fact Kerans seems to have been unduly harsh on the Chinese mess boys who had been helpful throughout the *Amethyst*'s ordeal on the Yangtse and had developed, by his own admission, a hearty dislike of communism by the end of their third month of detention at the hands of the PLA. Monthly Intelligence Report (hereafter M.I.R.), October 1949, 10 Nov. 1949, pp. 38-9, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.

13. Strain had been promoted to lieutenant commander on 25 July. This was a popular reward for one of the most outstanding individuals aboard the frigate. For a typical reaction see Frank's diary entry for 5 July 1949, p. 15, *Amethyst* Scrapbook II, Kerans 69/45/1, I.W.M.

14. *Ibid.*

15. M.I.R. October 1949, 46, 10 Nov. 1949, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.

16. Kerans to C-in-C (R) CONCORD, 300657Z, July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 68.

17. C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 250942Z, 25 July 1949, P.R.O. ADM 116/5695; C-in-C FES to Adm., 040840Z, 5 Aug. 1949, F11466/1219/10, FO 371/75895.

later in reminding the captain of the *Amethyst* that an escape bid should only be launched if the visibility and weather conditions were definitely favorable for such an attempt.[18] This more restrained signal appears to have been sent in response to a lengthy message he had received from Kerans indicating that he would not let another opportunity to escape pass without acting upon it.[19] Although Kerans' eagerness to escape was understandable, Brind was anxious to ensure that he did not condone any foolhardy exploit.

Neither the Admiralty nor the Foreign Office in London had been consulted by Brind before he sent his coded despatches to the *Amethyst*. When both departments were informed on 29 July about what had passed between the commander-in-chief and captain of the frigate, the Admiralty was at first inclined to give its unqualified support to Admiral Brind. This attitude changed when Lord Fraser, the chief of naval staff, ruled that no escape bid should be made by Kerans without further reference to the Admiralty.[20] His attitude of cautious restraint matched that of the Foreign Office. Although both departments felt great sympathy for all those on board the *Amethyst* and wished to bring their ordeal to a timely end, each remained hopeful that this could be secured by diplomatic means. As such they preferred Kerans to take the less dynamic option of continuing with negotiations rather than staging a decisive plan of action which might come to grief in a painful way in the near future. As a Foreign Office minute put it at the time:

> An attempt to break out, whether successful or unsuccessful, might have grave repercussions on British interests, possibly even on British lives, in Communist China. Our efforts to reach some sort of accommodation with the Communists and the preservation of our economic interests would receive a serious—conceivably fatal—setback. For these reasons, it is submitted that we should resist any suggestion that the Commander of Amethyst should be authorised to break out until Sir. R. Stevenson has been given a full opportunity to provide an assessment of the political risks involved.[21]

By the time that the Admiralty had taken its cue from Lord Fraser and sent a signal to Brind countermanding his advice to Kerans and ordering him instead to refrain from any action which might inflame the tense situation on the Yangtse, the *Amethyst* was on her way downriver and could not be recalled.[22]

While the government bureaucracy in London ground on relentlessly and to little effect, activity of a more purposeful kind was taking place on board the frigate. Kerans knew that before his escape plan could be activated much remained to be done on board ship. At 6:30 p.m. he told the engine room artificer what was afoot and swore him to secrecy. A little over an hour later, as Williams tackled his duties below decks with renewed vigor, the captain invited seventeen chief and petty officers into his cabin, together with a small number of ratings, to divulge what he had already revealed to his fellow officers on board. His news was greeted with a mixture of excitement and relief that the waiting was over. This 'gung-ho' attitude was infectious and helped to show that morale on board had remained astonishingly high after such a long period of confinement. Kerans admitted that the journey downriver was bound to be dangerous but that it constituted their only chance of doing something for themselves. If they waited much longer, they would not be masters of their own destiny.[23]

Aware that the odds against their success were still fairly considerable, the men showed no hesitation in accepting the risks involved and immediately got down to discussing the practical details. It was agreed, for instance, that a number of damage control parties would be selected and given their instructions before the frigate got under way and that some of the men would be detailed to try and camouflage the outline of the *Amethyst* and make her pass for an L.S.T. Kerans hoped that this ruse might work if her silhouette could be changed. Arrangements were made, therefore, to rig some black canvas from the area at the rear of the bridge and funnel forward along the upper part of the deck to "A" gun mounting and beyond. At the same time others used the cover of darkness to splash black paint on the off-white colored superstructure and side of the ship, while the anchor chain was to be lagged with hammock bedding that had been soaked in soft soap so as reduce noise when it was weighed. At the same time another party of men were supervising the flooding of the forward ballast tank, 'X' magazine and numbers 1, 2, 7 and 8 oil fuel

18. *Ibid;* C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 280442Z, 28 July 1949, P.R.O. ADM 116/5695.

19. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 261320Z, 26 July 1949, ADM 116/5695. C-in-C FES to Adm., 290956Z, 29 July 1949, F11480/1219/10, FO 371/75895.

20. Minute by P.D. Coates, 5 August 1949, F11480/1219/10, FO 371/75895; Minute by F.S. Tomlinson, 30 July 1949, F11508/1219/10, FO 371/75895.

21. *Ibid.* Sir Ralph Stevenson had been British ambassador to China since 1946. In keeping with the other foreign embassies in China, the British envoy and his staff had remained at Nanking after its fall to the Communists on 24-25 April 1949.

22. *Ibid;* F.O. to Nanking, 862, 30 July 1949, F11480/1219/10, FO 371/75895.

23. *Amethyst* Report, p. 65.

HMS *Amethyst* (courtesy of Captain Charles Baker).

tanks to ensure that the increase in weight would lower the ship's center of gravity and improve her overall stability in what was bound to be a flood tide.[24] Another group was charged with splinter protection duties. These involved placing hammocks, cushions and bedding around the bridge, the W/T office and on both sides of the after mess deck. Bags of flour were also used for this purpose on the bridge and around the W/T office on the starboard side.[25]

The men made these preparations in the sure knowledge that if the worst happened and the ship were damaged beyond repair, the captain would attempt to beach and destroy her once the crew were put ashore. Kerans made it clear that under these circumstances, the men should try and get to Shanghai or the relative safety of the open sea by any means at their disposal.[26]

As the men scurried around the ship intent on finishing as many of the duties assigned to them as possible before the time of departure, an unexpected and thoroughly unwelcome development took place. At about 8:25 p.m. a sampan was spotted coming towards the ship from the shore bearing vegetables, eggs and beer ordered from the traders who had been out to the ship earlier in the day. If a local contractor came on board, noticed any untoward activity going on and mentioned it to the Communist authorities on his return to the shore, it would compromise the entire mission. Kerans had to act quickly in order to stave off such a threat and to keep the crew from panicking. He rapidly issued a set of instructions to his men as the sampan drew alongside the *Amethyst*. They immediately stopped work and some hurriedly undressed and got into their bunks as though they were turning in for the night. Meanwhile the stores petty officer was

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 63, 65; M.I.R. October 1949, 46, 10 Nov. 1949, p. 42, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.

25. 'Engineering Exploits,' p. 421, *Amethyst* Scrapbook, II, Kerans 69/45/1, I.W.M.

26. If he was forced to blow up the ship, Kerans would have resorted to using the 24 detonators which he kept hidden on board for just this purpose. Before doing so, however, he intended to open all the sea cocks, destroy the W/T office and set fire to the stock of oil fuel. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

ordered to go down the gangway to the sampan, unload the supplies and ensure that the traders did not come up on deck. Even though he did not have the services of an interpreter, Justin McCarthy produced an inspired performance in the best traditions of British vaudeville. Adopting an air of aggrieved surprise and complaining loudly about shortages in the supplies, he kept up a stream of mildly reproachful banter for the entire seventeen minute period it took to transfer the provisions. The appearance of calm paid off. As the sampan pushed off from the side of the ship and moved towards the shore, the relief of all those watching and waiting apprehensively for its departure was palpable.[27]

After plotting a course on the incomplete set of navigational charts of the Yangtse which he had on board, Kerans went up to the darkened bridge at about 9:00 p.m. and remained there for over an hour so that his eyes might become accustomed to the night time gloom. He may have hoped for cloudy, overcast conditions to enhance the *Amethyst*'s chances of escape, but the evening was both dry and reasonably clear.[28] Knowing that his ship had to make it downriver to the open sea by dawn, Kerans could not afford to wait around indefinitely in the hope that the weather would worsen. Shortly after 10:00 p.m., as he wrestled with the problem of when to give the order to cut the anchor cable, he had an enormous stroke of luck. A fully lit merchant ship rounded Tasha Island on its way downriver. As the *Kiang Ling Liberation* approached the *Amethyst*, Kerans sensed that the time to begin the perilous descent of the Yangtse had arrived. He realized that if his frigate could leave her berth, execute a 180° turn in the river and follow closely in the wake of the Chinese ship as she steamed towards Shanghai, the major problem of trying to navigate the first few miles of a tricky stretch of water without the aid of a reliable chart would be overcome. For this reason, if for no other, Kerans did not hesitate. He gave orders to start the port engine and slip the anchor cable in such a way that it would result in swinging the bows of the *Amethyst* 45° to starboard and allow the fast running current to assist in bringing the vessel round to point downstream. At 10:12 p.m. the frigate slipped her anchor cable and moved off without making much noise. Initially nearly everything went according to plan and even when it did not nothing disastrous happened; the ship made her turn in under half a minute amid a flurry of yellow sparks from her funnel and began forging downriver at 10 knots astern of the *Kiang Ling Liberation*.[29]

According to the official report, the next few minutes were among the most nerve-wracking of the entire journey:

> In a very short space of time the "Kiang Ling Liberation" was challenged by a flare from the batteries and she replied with the usual siren signal. I noticed another small vessel on my port bow fully lit which appeared to be an L.C.I.(L) or H.D.M.L. converted. A second flare went up which was obviously intended for me, I did not reply but continued on my way. The L.C.I.(L) or H.D.M.L. opened fire at the batteries across my bows. My first impression was that he was trying to stop me and I was prepared to ram him if necessary. Within a very few seconds I came under heavy artillery and small arms fire. The 75 m.m. and 105 m.m. fire was accurate but Bofors and Oerlikon were well over. I gave orders for "full ahead" and was hit forward of the bridge on the water line on the starboard side. My first impression was that we were badly hit in the starboard engine or boiler room. We heeled well over to starboard and I thought it possible we might sink soon. I weaved heavily but it was some minutes before "full ahead" was reached and with shallow water, steering was extremely difficult. By then the "Kiang Ling Liberation" had switched off all her lights, had turned to port (to the Northern Bank) and appeared to have stopped. I managed to get past the "Kiang Ling Liberation" with a few feet to spare, made black smoke and continued on my way.[30]

In the midst of all the action and with the ship listing some 35° to starboard, Kerans told French to send a flash signal to Admiral Brind. It said simply: "I AM UNDER HEAVY FIRE AND BEEN HIT."[31] It was exactly 10:33 p.m. Fortune continued to smile on the *Amethyst*, however, because far from suffering serious damage, the frigate had only sustained a relatively light blow from what appears to have been a 75 mm shell exploding near to the waterline on the starboard side. Apart from causing extreme underwater turbulence, the shell did nothing more than buckle and loosen a few plates in the close vicinity of the naval stores. As a result there was some flooding which was easily contained by the damage control parties; the ship only lost speed momentarily and thereafter moved to full ahead both without any major difficulty.[32]

If the *Amethyst* virtually got away unharmed from this first encounter with the PLA artillery, the *Kiang Ling*

27. *Sunday Pictorial*, 7 August 1949; *Amethyst* Log, 30 July 1949, P.R.O. ADM 53/125424; Lawrence Earl, *Yangtse Incident* (London, 1973), pp. 150-1.
28. *Amethyst* Report, p. 65.
29. *Ibid.*
30. *Ibid.*, p. 66. L.C.I.(L) was the abbreviated form of Landing Craft, Infantry, (Large) and H.D.M.L. referred to a Harbour Defense Motor Launch.
31. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301333Z, July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 68.
32. Earl, pp. 153-6; *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES (Afloat), (R) Admiralty, 312258Z, July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, pp. 66, 71-2.

Liberation was not so fortunate. Whether by accident or design the Communist batteries singled her out for a withering barrage of shells. Caught up in something which must have taken her captain completely by surprise, the ship moved to port, switched off all her lights and began using her siren in an almost demented way. It failed to do any good. As she moved towards the Communist gun positions the shells continued to rain down on her. She soon became a smoking wreck, sinking with the loss of roughly 40 lives.[33]

By this time *Amethyst*, who had only managed one round from her "B" gun, had stopped firing at the shore with her Bren guns and Oerlikon because Kerans did not wish to draw attention to her position in the middle of the river.[34] Even so the captain estimated that a minimum of four batteries were still engaging his ship, as his next signal to Brind indicated: "STILL UNDER HEAVY FIRE. JUST PASSED ESPIGLE POINT."[35] Fortunately the *Amethyst*'s speed and darkened from made her a difficult target to hit in the murky light. Although they did their best, the PLA gun crews failed to register any more direct hits on the frigate as she sped on her way through the Tan-tu Reach towards Rose Island, the point where the Yangtse incident had begun over three months before. At 10:50 p.m. Brind sent a flash signal to Kerans: "WELL DONE. WE ARE ALL WATCHING AND HOPE IT WILL BE DIFFICULT TO HIT YOU."[36] At precisely the same moment Kerans had fired off another signal to his commander-in-chief pointing out that he was off Rose Island. Surprisingly the ship encountered no opposition as it passed to the north of the island and to the south of San-chiang-ying where Colonel Kang's battery had once been located.[37] Both banks of the river remained dark and silent as *Amethyst* forged on towards Kiangyin at maximum speed aided by a fast flowing current. Nothing untoward happened as she closed on and then passed to the east of Bate Point. At 12:24 a.m., another flash signal sent by Kerans crossed with anxious query from Brind asking for an update on the ship's progress. Kerans issued a fairly immediate reply: "SO FAR O.K."[38]

It did not remain so for long. As the *Amethyst* approached Kiangyin, a flare revealed her position and she came under fire immediately. Kerans wasted no time in ordering the engine room to produce as much black smoke as possible in an effort to lay an impenetrable screen across the river and obscure the exact whereabouts of the ship. He had realized in advance that things were bound to be more hazardous at Kiangyin because the town had become a military stronghold of the Communists.[39] It was reasonable to assume, therefore, that there were likely to be a number of batteries situated along the waterfront of the port. If the *Amethyst* could get past these guns unscathed, a more formidable obstacle still had to be overcome in the shape of a submerged boom, consisting of a row of sunken ships laid by the Chinese at the start of the last Sino-Japanese War and placed in the river in such a way as to leave only a relatively small navigable channel for ships to pass through on their way up or downriver. Flanked by what Kerans feared were nests of guns, the boom was bound to be an exceedingly dangerous barrier for the frigate to circumvent.[40] At 12:57 a.m. *Amethyst* flashed the disconcerting signal: "UNDER HEAVY FIRE OFF KIANGYIN."[41] As she neared the boom the firing naturally became more intense, but the artillery troops failed to find the correct range or inflict any further damage on the ship.[42] Kerans only replied with Bren gun fire as he did not wish to illuminate the ship by sending any four-inch salvos from "B" gun. At 1:09 a.m. another flash signal announced that the frigate was rapidly approaching the boom.[43] According to the navigation chart he possessed, Kerans expected the boom's presence in the river to be indicated by two lights. He knew that the course to take was to steer between the lights in the narrow lane indicated by two rows of white buoys. Unfortunately, all he could see from the bridge of the *Amethyst* was a solitary light in the middle of the river. If the buoys marking the narrow channel existed, he claims he did not see them. He was now in a real quandary without any useful clue as to which side of the light he should attempt to pass. He knew that if he chose wrongly the

33. *South China Morning Post*, 20 August 1949.
34. *Amethyst* Report, p. 66.
35. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301342Z, 30 July 1949, A.S.L. July, Kerans 69/45/1, I.W.M.
36. C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 301350Z, 30 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 68.
37. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301350Z; 301416Z, 30 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 68.
38. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES (Afloat), 301524Z; 301536Z, 31 July 1949, C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 301525Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, pp. 68-9.
39. *Amethyst* Report, pp. 66-67.
40. *The Times*, 4 August 1949; Earl, pp. 156-8.
41. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES (Afloat), 301557Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 69.
42. A patrol boat also seems to have been close to the boom. Kerans admits that it used small arms fire against the *Amethyst* without much success. M.I.R. October 1949, 46, 10 Nov. 1949, p. 49, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.
43. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301609Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 69.

escape bid of the *Amethyst* would almost certainly end explosively with the ship smashing into the boom at high speed. If this happened it was inconceivable that the frigate would remain afloat for long since the likelihood was that the bottom of the vessel would be immediately ripped open or peeled off by the hidden barrier. In this event the *Amethyst* would soon join the other sunken wrecks littering the river bed and form a tragic new layer of the boom. Without any real clue as to which side of the light the navigable channel lay, Kerans opted to steer close to the port side. Once he chose the course to take there was nothing to do but to pray that luck or the Almighty was on his side. As the *Amethyst* careered towards the light and passed to the port side of it, Kerans waited for the sickening impact that would spell instant disaster. Miraculously, it never came. Instead the ship went through the gap in the boom without the slightest damage and on past the town to the widespread relief of her captain and crew.[44]

Half an hour later at 1:39 a.m. Kerans dictated another signal to French. It informed Brind that they had covered half the distance to Shanghai.[45] This flash signal inspired a longer reply than normal from the commander-in-chief:

YOUR 301639 SPLENDID. IF YOU CANNOT GET ABOUT TEN MILES PAST WOOSUNG BEFORE DAWN SUGGEST YOU EITHER LAY UP DURING DAYLIGHT OR TAKE THE TSUNG MING CROSSING AND NORTH CHANNEL WHICH SHOULD BE NAVIGATED AT SLOW SPEED.[46]

A mere 50 minutes later *Amethyst* announced that she had passed the one hundred mile mark.[47] She was now five-eighths of the way down the Yangtse and the next major test would come when she reached the area of the Woosung Forts close to the end of her heroic 150 mile journey to the open sea. Brind labelled it "A MAGNIFICENT CENTURY" which it very clearly was given the fact that the ship was tearing down one of the most dangerous stretches of navigable water in the world in the dark and without any experienced local pilot on board to assist in choosing the correct course to take.[48] This aspect of the escape bid alone justifies it as a brilliant piece of helmsmanship. Although batteries and fortifications presented very real dangers to the *Amethyst*, the River Yangtse itself was the most obvious source of constant threat. A slight error or a bad stroke of luck at any moment could bring the whole effort to a juddering halt. No one could afford to think that the worst was over when there were still several hours of hazardous steaming to go.[49]

Kerans estimated that if everything went according to plan he would reach Woosung at about 5:30 a.m. He sent a message to Brind asking for HMS *Concord* to cover him at this point just in case the Communists tried to bombard the ship as it passed the forts.[50] Apart from acknowledging that he would do so, Brind sent a message to *Concord*, repeated for the benefit of *Amethyst*, which was very explicit in this regard: "IF AMETHYST PASSES WOOSUNG NEAR DAWN SUPPORT HER BY ENGAGING BATTERIES FROM SEAWARD IF THEY OPEN FIRE. YOU SHOULD NOT GO ABOVE IDENTIFIED BATTERIES EXCEPT IN EMERGENCY."[51] This was amended in a later signal to read: "DO NOT GO ABOVE QUARANTINE BOUY (sic) EXCEPT IN EMERGENCY. SMOKE MAY BE USEFUL."[52] At 3:50 a.m. *Amethyst* flashed a signal to the destroyer *Concord* asking her to be in position off Woosung and indicating her own progress: "CENTAUR LOWER BUOY COME QUICK."[53] Shortly afterwards at about 4:00 a.m. the *Amethyst*, making good progress on the swollen tide at roughly 22 knots, suddenly struck something. She shuddered sickeningly for a few seconds before returning to normal. Leslie Frank, who had been at the wheel from the time that the *Amethyst* had slipped her moorings just over five hours before, had been asked by Kerans to steer "Hard a starboard" and then "Hard a port," but these orders had come too late for the frigate to avoid running down and cutting in half a darkened junk which had drifted

44. Earl, pp. 156-8.
45. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301639Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 69.
46. C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 301652Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 69.
47. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301742Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 69.
48. C-in-C FES to *Amethyst*, 301810Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 70.

49. Much of the credit for the course taken down river must go to Lieutenant Keir Hett who acted as the navigating officer and read the chart throughout the entire journey. Even so the unpredictable still happened; the lowest depth recorded on the passage was only 3 fathoms. At this point *Amethyst*'s speed had to be cut since steering became virtually impossible. Fortunately it did not take long for the channel to get deeper so that the frigate was soon able to resume her top speed once again. M.I.R. October 1949, 46, 10 Nov. 1949, pp. 49-50, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.
50. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 301809Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, pp. 67, 69. In the signal which Kerans actually sent he mistakenly asked for *Rodney* not *Concord*.
51. C-in-C FES (Afloat) to CONCORD (R) *Amethyst*, 301801Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 70.
52. C-in-C FES to CONCORD (R) *Amethyst*, 301827Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 70
53. *Amethyst* to CONCORD, 301850Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 70.

into her path.[54] Kerans did not stop to survey the scene of the accident or pick up any survivors. Although he felt badly about what had happened and the innocent and unnumbered victims who had been on board the junk, he realized that the collision had been unavoidable. If he stopped and conducted a search for any survivors in the murky and swirling waters of the Yangtse, the time spent on this quest would ensure that the *Amethyst* could not make it downriver to the open sea by daybreak. Not wishing to jeopardize the entire mission, or put all his men at risk once again, Kerans took the pragmatic option and did not look back.[55]

After this mishap, the *Amethyst* continued to make good progress down the ever widening river. It was surprising that her machinery held up as magnificently as it did under the strain of being continuously used flat out for the first time in over three months. Those working down in the engine room soon realized, however, that top speed could only be obtained at the cost of working in temperatures in excess of 150° F.[56] Their determined efforts to keep things going in what was clearly a most taxing environment rates as one of the most gruelling and commendable feats of the whole enterprise.[57]

An hour after the unfortunate ramming of the junk, Brind was informed by French that Woosung was in sight.[58] It was 5:03 a.m. Kerans could see the searchlights from the fort sweeping back and forth across the river and sensibly decided to steer a course which took his ship as far from both the Paoshan and Woosung forts as possible. As the *Amethyst* approached the latter at 22 knots, dawn began to break. Kerans ordered those on the "B" gun mounting to be ready to fire on the fort some 4½ miles away if the searchlight picked up the silhouette of the frigate and drew the attention of the Communist artillery to her position on the Yangtse. Although the searchlights did move across the *Amethyst* twice they did not stop on either occasion but swept on past the vessel. As a result, the guns of Woosung, the last major hazard of this epic voyage, remained silent. *Amethyst* passed the Quarantine Buoy at Woosung at 5:25 a.m. Four minutes later she signalled Brind that *Concord* was in sight.[59] As the two ships of the Royal Navy closed on each other, the relief and jubilation of all those on deck who could see what was happening was unconfined. *Concord*'s cheery and almost incredulously worded welcoming signal: "FANCY MEETING YOU AGAIN" was greeted by Kerans with the response that: "NEVER, NEVER HAS A SHIP BEEN MORE WELCOME."[60] In a separate signal to Brind, repeated for the benefit of the Admiralty in London, Kerans issued a stirring message which would soon be emblazoned across much of the world's press: "HAVE REJOINED THE FLEET SOUTH OF WOOSUNG, NO DAMAGE OR CASUALTIES. *GOD SAVE THE KING.*"[61] It soon received the following acknowledgement from the commander-in-chief of the Far East Station:

YOUR 302032. WELCOME BACK TO THE FLEET. WE ARE ALL EXTREMELY PROUD OF YOUR MOST GALLANT AND SKILFUL ESCAPE AND THAT ENDURANCE OF AND FORTITUDE DISPLAYED BY EVERYONE HAS BEEN REWARDED WITH SUCH SUCCESS. YOUR BEARING IN ADVERSITY AND YOUR DARING PASSAGE TONIGHT WILL BE EPIC IN THE HISTORY OF THE NAVY.[62]

King George VI responded enthusiastically to the news of the *Amethyst*'s escape. In a despatch to Brind, which was made public and reprinted in *The Times* on 1 August, the king joined in the praise of everyone aboard the frigate for the courage, skill and determination shown throughout their long vigil on the Yangtse. He ended with the familiar refrain: "Splice the mainbrace."[63]

Before they could do so in some style, however, the battered frigate had a few more hours' steaming to do. Accompanied by *Concord*, *Amethyst* made her untroubled way out of the estuary into the open sea. Her success was astounding in every sense of the word; nothing illustrated this better than the fact that when she hove to off the North Saddles in mid-morning, *Amethyst*

54. Frank Diary, 31 July 1949, p. 25, *Amethyst* Scrapbook, vol. II, Kerans 69/45/1, I.W.M.

55. *Amethyst* Report, pp. 67, 71-2; *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 302241Z, 31 July 1949, F11466/1219/10; F.O. to Nanking. 896, 5 Aug. 1949, F11544/1219/10, FO 371/75895.

56. *The Times*, 4 August 1949.

57. According to Kerans, two of the ratings in the engine room fainted because of the excessive heat which, he suggests, rose to between 160°-170° F. M.I.R. October 1949, 46, 10 Nov., 1949, p. 48, P.R.O. ADM 223/230.

58. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 302003Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 70.

59. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, 302029Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 71.

60. *Concord* to *Amethyst*, NIL DTG; *Amethyst* to *Concord*, 302034Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 71.

61. *Amethyst* to C-in-C FES, (R) Admiralty, 302032Z, 31 July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 71.

62. C-in-C FES to *Amethyst* (R) Admiralty, 302100Z, July 1949, in *Amethyst* Report, p. 71.

63. *The Times*, 1 August 1949. Once notified that *Amethyst* was safe, Clement Atlee offered his congratulations to Kerans and his crew in a personal message for them relayed by the Admiralty and Admiral Brind, see Adm. to C-in-C FES, 302339A, T170/49, 30 July 1949, Prem 8/944.

had only nine tons of usable fuel left in her tanks.[64]

After allowing his men to rest during the day, Kerans sailed for Hong Kong on Sunday evening (31 July) in an effort to make the best of the good weather prevailing in the region at this time. *Amethyst*, accompanied initially by *Concord* and subsequently by the destroyer HMS *Cossack*, made decent progress down the Chinese coastline at 14 knots in light seas. After an emotional rendezvous with the cruiser HMS *Jamaica* at sea north of Formosa on the evening of 1 August, the frigate continued on her passage southwards.[65] Very little happened to spoil the *Amethyst*'s party on this voyage, not even the difficulties she experienced with one of her boilers which forced her to limp into harbour in Hong Kong later than expected. When she did finally arrive at 11:00 a.m. on Wednesday 3 August, she was given a rousing welcome by the hundreds of spectators who had waited patiently on the dock to greet her.[66]

By any yardstick, the escape of the *Amethyst* was a triumph of seamanship. It was a gamble that paid off handsomely for John Simon Kerans and his crew. In abandoning all hope of a negotiated end to the Yangtse incident and staking everything on trying to make a river passage at night, Kerans was clearly giving vent to his true feelings. He was, after all, an inspirational leader whose flair and charisma had consistently proved to have been a most important asset throughout the *Amethyst*'s long vigil on the Yangtse. A complex and rather rebellious character, Kerans' resolve to face down the Communists, even under desperately difficult conditions, had been buttressed to a large extent by the loyal support he had consistently received from Lieutenant George Strain. Although Kerans was depicted by the non-Communist press as the dashing hero of the Yangtse crisis, the relatively unsung qualities of George Strain during the entire episode deserved more attention than they received. Strain helped Kerans cope with the very intense pressures he was under throughout the long, drawn-out crisis on the river and helped his captain build up a very loyal following among his men on board the frigate. As a result, if either man was prepared to risk his life for freedom so were they.

To be fair, however, it must be acknowledged that the Yangtse incident must be seen as basically Kerans' show. Far from being unreliable or reckless, as many in the Admiralty were wont to see him, he had shown a most remarkable amount of restraint in the painfully frustrating series of negotiations he had endured with the PLA delegation between April and July. The little progress which had been made in these sessions had been enough to convince him that something more drastic than talking was required to extricate his ship and men from their predicament. Sensing that Admiral Brind was restless for some action and supportive of any decision within limits that he might take to supply it, Kerans had little difficulty in choosing an adventurous end to the Yangtse story.[67]

Despite the fact that Kerans' successful escape bid provided a final solution to the *Amethyst* crisis, his decisive act was not initially welcomed by British officials either in Nanking or Whitehall. Although understandable, Kerans' willingness to tempt fate in this cavalier manner was obviously a gamble whose chances of success were incalculable. Sir Ralph Stevenson, the British ambassador, who admitted later that he would not have given his assent to such a risky enterprise if he had been consulted in advance, spent a sleepless night waiting for news of the *Amethyst* as she sped downriver on the flood tide.[68] Both he and Lord Fraser, the first sea lord and chief of naval staff, who had actually turned down the plan when he learnt of its existence, admired Kerans' boldness and courage but were fearful of the complications that would result if the escape bid failed and anxious lest the brave men on board the frigate should perish in the attempt. In the event, of course, the vessel and her crew survived and became the heroes of the hour for the non-Communist world.[69]

While the escape undoubtedly soured Anglo-Chinese relations still further, the news of such a dramatic end to

64. *The Times*, 1 August 1949; Adm. to C-in-C FES, 302339A, T170/49, 30 July 1949, Prem 8/944.

65. According to the *South China Morning Post* of 2 August 1949, *Amethyst* met *Jamaica* at 0914 GMT (6:14 p.m. local time) on 1 August to the accompaniment of lusty cheering and good-natured ribaldry from the officers and men lined up on the cruiser's upper deck. At the same time, the band of the Royal Marines played a musical tribute to the crew of the *Amethyst*, featuring such old favorites as "Cruising Down the River on a Sunday Afternoon," "See the Conquering Hero Comes" and "For They Are Jolly Good Fellows."

66. *Amethyst* Report, p. 18.

67. John Simon Kerans was awarded the Distinguished Service Order (D.S.O.) by King George VI in August 1949 and promoted to Commander in December 1949. Sadly, controversy dogged his later career and he never received a further promotion after this date. He eventually retired from the Royal Navy in 1958 and became a Conservative member of parliament for The Hartlepools in 1959. After losing his seat at the next general election in 1964, he became a civil servant and worked for Pensions Appeal Tribunals from 1969 until he finally retired from public life in 1980. He died in 1985.

68. Interview with Mark B. Stevenson, Castletown, Isle of Man, 7 June 1988.

69. Fraser to Brind, 2 Sept. 1949, 2750/66B, P.R.O. ADM 205/72.

the hostage situation on the Yangtse was greeted with almost hysterical joy by the Western media. Newspaper and radio accounts of the *Amethyst*'s triumphant passage downriver did not require hyperbole on the part of a journalist or an editor to read like the type of fictional adventure story found in comic strips or the very popular *Boy's Own* paper. This story had a heroic dimension; a little ship defying not only the might of the Communist PLA, but also the treacherous currents of the Yangtse river in the dark. Coming as it did at the height of the cold war, the escape of the *Amethyst* could be read as an anti-Communist tract, a blow administered by the democracies against the totalitarian world, but it could also be enjoyed purely and simply as a demonstration of great naval skill and tenacity on the part of Lieutenant Commander Kerans and his crew. As Admiral Brind exclaimed at the time, their escape would come to be regarded as a naval epic.

It was also evident from the overwhelming reception the *Amethyst* received everywhere she went on her way home to the United Kingdom that this small frigate's exploits had touched an emotional chord in many people's lives. It was one that Clement Attlee's Labour government in London could ill afford to ignore, even though it realized that any public celebration of the *Amethyst*'s escape would reopen old wounds with the Chinese Communists and thereby exacerbate rather than improve the existing very poor state of Anglo-Chinese relations. Despite its anxiety on this score, the British government came to the conclusion that public opinion demanded that it must honor the men of the frigate when they returned home. Meticulous plans were, therefore, drawn up to do justice to the crew whose sterling deeds had proved to have been such an inspiration to the British public in the late summer of 1949. On 16 November 1949, for example, the city of London had its chance to pay its respects to these unlikely heroes of the ill-timed British intervention in the Chinese Civil War. After assembling on Horse Guards Parade, Kerans and his men marched to St. Martin-in-the-Fields for a thanksgiving service and from there on to Guildhall for a luncheon given by the Lord Mayor of London. Cheering crowds lined the entire route. On the following day a smaller delegation drawn from the officers and men of the ship was received by King George VI at Buckingham Palace. HMS *Amethyst* had been rewarded the ultimate accolade.[70]

70. A large file of correspondence on the arrangements for the *Amethyst*'s reception after arriving in the United Kingdom on 1 November 1949 is contained in P.R.O. ADM 116/5704; photographs and press cuttings from her triumphant voyage home are in the *Amethyst* Scrapbook, vols. I & II, Kerans, 69/45/1, I.W.M.

Malcolm Murfett was awarded his doctorate by Oxford University in 1980 and taught British and European History at the National University of Singapore from 1980-89. During the current academic year he has been a Visiting Associate Professor at York University in Toronto. He was elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society in January 1990. He is the author of Fool-proof Relations: The Search for Anglo-American Naval Cooperation During the Chamberlain Years 1937-1940 *(1984) and of several articles in international journals. His next two books* The Limitations of Military Power *and* Hostage on the Yangtze: Britain, China and the Amethyst Crisis of 1949 *are being published in the fall of 1990 by Macmillan and the U.S. Naval Institute Press respectively.*

In Memoriam
Archibald Ross Lewis

WITH the death of Archibald Ross Lewis on 4 February, 1990, in Tucson, Arizona, *The American Neptune* lost its editor; maritime scholarship, one of its leading historians; and his many friends, a warm and gregarious companion. He authored or edited fourteen books, dozens of articles, and over a hundred reviews. His broad interests ranged from the Roman Empire to the present with a focus on the early medieval period. He won international renown for his studies on a remarkable range of subjects.

Archibald Lewis was born on August 25, 1914 in Bronxville, New York. Due to his father's business activities, he lived in Japan and France. After taking his bachelor's degree at Princeton University in 1936, he studied Anthropology at Harvard University but returned to Princeton where he earned an M.A. in 1939 and Ph.D. in 1940.

Lewis then began a teaching career at the University of South Carolina, but, like so many of his generation, he found that career interrupted by service in World War II, his with an artillery division in the European theater. By war's end he had risen to the rank of major and had received both the Bronze Star and France's Croix de Guerre. In 1946 he returned to South Carolina and, in 1951, moved to the University of Texas. Three years later he married Elizabeth Cutler Lewis, an interior designer newly arrived in Dallas after working in New York City. At Texas he served as departmental chair on several occasions until 1969 when he became professor and chairman at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He retired in 1985.

Friends of Archibald Lewis soon came to know that he had a passionate and lifelong love of the sea, one that found frequent expression in his scholarship. His first book, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean, 500-1100 A.D.* (1951), set the tone and was followed by such other works as *The Northern Seas, 300-1100 A.D.* (1958), his collected maritime articles published as *The Sea and Medieval Civilizations* (1978), and, with Timothy J. Runyan, the more synthetic *European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500* (1985, paperback edition, 1990).

As Lewis put it in *The Northern Seas,* it was his "conviction that seas are not barriers now and were not in the Middle Ages. Rather they were highways which connected, influenced and tended to unify the lands whose shores they touched." His maritime studies documented that reality, and in so doing they also suggest why so many of his other works were devoted to comparative history and especially to a discussion of the creative energies that were likely to be released when peoples of different cultures came into contact at frontiers that earlier scholarship had deemed impenetrable. Thus, for example, *The Development of Southern French and Catalan Society, 718-1050* (1965) demonstrated just how much economic development this society had experienced in a supposedly retrograde period, and it went on brilliantly to suggest how political fragmentation in an overwhelmingly allodial world had encouraged lay sponsorship of monastic reform. *Knights and Samurai: Feudalism in Northern France and Japan* (1974) suggested with understated modesty how similar factors—geographic, environmental, economic, and political—had created such remarkably similar warrior classes in such widely separated lands. Lastly, in one of his many ventures in editing, *The Islamic World and the West, 622-1492* (1971), briefly sketched what had happened when Muslim East had met Christian West. By 1988 and the publication of *Nomads and Crusaders, A.D. 1000-1368,* he was prepared to take on Byzantium including Russia, Islam, Western Europe, China, and India—to which he then added the rise of the Mongols to a position of world domination.

This last work was selected by *Choice* as an outstanding academic book. His broad grasp of the relationship of eastern and western cultures was demonstrated again in his presidential address to the Medieval Academy of America in Cambridge, Massachusetts, printed in the October 1990 issue of *Speculum,* the Academy's journal.

Given his accomplishments, it is hardly surprising that

Archibald Lewis received many of the honors that the academy can bestow. A Fellow of the Medieval Academy of America, the Royal Historical Society, and the Middle Eastern Studies Association, he held an honorary degree from the University of Montpellier and in 1979 received the Chancellor's Medal of the University of Massachusetts. Research fellowships include ones received from the Ford Foundation, the Fulbright Commission, the American Council of Learned Societies, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation. He served as Vice-President of both the International Commission for Maritime History and the North American Society for Oceanic History.

Above all else, however, Archibald Lewis was a teacher, one with the highest standards. In addition to his university posts, he also taught in the maritime studies program at Mystic Seaport, Connecticut.

Professor Lewis moved to a seaside home in Marblehead nearby the Peabody Museum where he directed the publication of *The American Neptune*. With characteristic enthusiasm he was soon changing its format and broadening its coverage so it would reach a wider audience. He also worked to establish an endowment fund to sustain *The American Neptune*. It was at the Peabody Museum that a memorial garden was created in honor of Betty and Archie's two deceased children.

Archibald Ross Lewis will be sorely missed, but we will continue to celebrate his life through his many scholarly publications, the memories of his students and friends, and in the pages of this journal to which he was so devoted.

TIMOTHY J. RUNYAN

Index to Volumes XLVI-L

Dates in parentheses after the names of vessels indicate either the years of building or the reference. Dates indicating the year of the reference are printed in italic type; vessels having compound names are indexed under the initial letter of the *first* word. A list of vessels having compound names arranged alphabetically by their *last* names, follows the index.

The cumulative five-year index to Volumes XLVI (1986) through L (1990) was prepared by Geraldine M. Ayers of the Peabody Museum Staff.

Abbotsford, steamer *(1870)*, XLIX, 24.
Abeel, David, XLVIII, 275 ff.
Abercrombie, Rev. Doctor James, L, 245 ff.
Abercrombie, General Robert, XLVI, 21.
Acerra, Martin and Jean Meyer, *La Grande époque de la Marine à voile*, review by, XLVIII, 207.
"Acting Master Samuel B. Gregory: The Trials of An Unexperienced Captain on the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron," by Mark Roman Schultz, L, 89-93.
Active, ship *(1802)*, XLVIII, 246 ff.
Adamant, ship *(1777)*, XLVII, 8.
Adams, ship *(1813)*, XLIX, 42.
Adams, ship *(1842)*, XLVII, 92.
Adams, Charles Francis, XLIX, 119.
Adams, John Quincy, XLVI, 148; XLVII, 27.
Adams, Josiah, L, 213 ff.
Adams, Moses, L, 211 ff.
Adams, Thomas, XLVII, 90.
Admiral Harold R. Stark, Architect of Victory 1939-1945, by B. Mitchell Simpson, III, reviewed, L, 146.
Adriatic, steamer *(1849)*, XLVIII, 113.
Adventure, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Adventure, H.M.S. ship *(1825)*, L, 32.
Aetna, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.
African Steam Ship Company, The, XLVI, 108.
African Steam Navigation Company, Ltd, XLVIII, 55.
Agassiz, Louis, XLVI, 60; XLIX, 36.
Agnes G. Donahoe, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Alabama, Confederate raider *(1864)*, XLVII, 118; XLIX, 117.
Albany Iron Works, XLVIII, 107 ff.
Albany Nail Factory, XLVIII, 107 ff.
Albany and Rensselaer Iron & Steel Company, XLVIII, 129.
Albee, Jr., Parker B., XLVI, 111.
Albemarle, Confederate ironclad *(1865)*, XLVIII, 104; XLIX, 122.
Albert L. Ellsworth, tanker *(1942)*, L, 46.
Albion, Robert Greenhalgh, XLVI, 221; XLVII, 92.
Albuquerque, L. de, L, 281.
Alden, John G., XLVIII, 182.
Alert, lighthouse tender *(1861)*, XLVIII, 87.
Alert, Salem-built brigantine *(1798)*, XLIX, 272.
Alert, ship *(1864)*, XLVII, 121, 165; L, 32.
Alexander Gordon & Company, XLVII, 90.
Alfred, ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 158.
Alice Dollar, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Alice Gertrude, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Allaire Iron Works, XLVIII, 119.
Allan, John, XLVI, 261.
Allard, Dean C., "Naval Technology During the American Civil War," XLIX, 114-122.
Allardyce, Governor William Lamond, XLIX, 282.
Allen, Jr., Captain Charles H., XLVII, 121.
Allen Family Chart, XLVII, 122.
Allen, George H., XLVII, 119.
Allen, Horatio, XLVIII, 112.
Allen, III, Solomon, XLVI, 214.
Allen, William, XLVII, 122.
Alligator, submarine *(1863)*, XLIX, 122.
Allin, Lawrence Carroll, "*Telos*, the Last American Brig and Bangor River's Class of '83," XLIX, 29-33.
Alsberg, Libby, review by, XLVI, 129.
Alva, yacht *(1892)*, XLVII, 127.
America, British ship *(1749)*, XLVIII, 26.
America, twin-engine seaplane (1917), XLVII, 249.
American Maritime Prints, reviewed, XLVI, 120.
AMERICAN NEPTUNE, THE, editorial comment, XLVI, 4, 76, 140, 212; XLVII, 4, 76, 156, 228; XLVIII, 4, 76, 148, 220; XLIX, 4, 76, 150, 250; L, 4.
American Passenger Ships: The Ocean Lines and Liners, 1873-1983, by Frederick E. Emmons, reviewed, XLVII, 55.
American President Lines and its Forebears, 1848-1984, by John Niven, reviewed, XLVIII, 201.
American Ship Building Company and Predecessors, 1867-1920, Institute for Great Lakes Research, reviewed, L, 139.
"American Steam Navigation in China, 1845-1878," by Edward Kenneth Haviland, XLIX, 21-28.
'American Threat to the Newfoundland Fisheries, 1776-1777, The,' by Olaf Uwe Janzen, XLVIII, 154-164.
'Americans and American Trade in India, 1784-1814,' by G. Bhagat, XLVI, 6-15.
Ames, Fisher, XLVI, 12.
Amethyst, HMS, British frigate *(1949)*, L, 291.
Amherst, Lord, XLVIII, 237.
Amory Sibley, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
Amphitheatre, ship *(1799)*, XLVI, 162.
Amphrite, armed merchant schooner *(1798)*, L, 270.
Amsterdam, Dutch East India ship, *(1748)*, XLVII, 279.
Amundsen, Roald, L, 35.
Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Marine Corps History, An, by Paolo E. Coletta, reviewed, XLVII, 215.
Anatomy of the Ship: The Type VII U-Boat, by David Westwood, reviewed, XLVII, 55.
Anderson, Elizabeth Stanton, *Towboats and Tugs*, reviewed, L, 139.
Andover Theological Seminary, Andover, MA, XLVI, 35.
Andrea Doria—Dive to An Era, by Gary Gentile, reviewed, L, 144.
Anglo-American Oil Company, Ltd., XLVII, 47.
Angus, Master Commandant Samuel, XLVII, 27.
Ann, steamer (ex-*Maria*), *(1860)*, XLIX, 26.
Ann and Hope, ship *(1800)*, L, 270.

Anna, brig *(1808)*, L, 103.
Annie E. Larder, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Annie Lord, schooner *(1883)*, XLIX, 30.
'Antebellum Canton Tea Trade: Recent Perspectives, The,' by Robert Gardella, XLVIII, 261-270.
Antelope, British ship *(1862)*, XLIX, 21.
Antioch, ship *(1835)*, XLVII, 90 ff.
Aphis, HMS gunboat *(1930)*, L, 188.
'*Appam* and American Neutrality, The,' by Phyllis, A. Hall, XLVIII, 50-58
Appam, British passenber liner *(1916)*, XLVIII, 50 ff., photo of, XLVIII, 53.
Appendix 1, Vessels with Letters of Marque, 1625-30, XLIX, 261.
Appleton, Dr. John S., XLIX, 34.
Appleby, John C., 'The Charter Party of the *Triall:* An Unsuccessful Virginia Venture, 1606-1607,' XLVII, 77-82.
Appleby, John, "A. Pathway Out of Debt: The Privateering Activities of Sir John Hippisley During the Early Stuart Wars with Spain and France, 1625-30," XLIX, 251-261.
AR VAG, by Bernard Cadoret, reviewed, XLVII, 142.
Arago, steam packet *(1840)*, XLVIII, 114.
Arbuthnot, Admiral Marriot, XLVII, 11.
Archangel, ship *(1605)*, L, 13.
Arctic, steamship *(1849)*, XLVIII, 113.
Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas, by W. Gillies Ross, reviewed, XLVII, 62.
Ardman, Harvey, Normandie: *Her Life and Times*, reviewed, XLVII, 141.
Arethusa, schooner-yacht *(1886)*, XLIX, 37.
Argenteau, before 1674, photo of, L, 175.
Ariel, ship *(1787)*, L, 245 ff.
Ariel, Union ship *(1862)*, XLVIII, 90.
Arizona, Pacific Mail steamer *(1866)*, XLVIII, 127.
"Armed Merchantmen and Privateers: Another Perspective On America's Quasi-War With France," by John D. Pelzer, L, 270.
Armed Transport Bounty, *The*, by John McKay, reviewed, L, 72.
Arming and Fitting of English Ships of War, 1600-1815, The, by Brian Lavery, reviewed, XLIX, 306.
Arming the Fleet: U.S. Navy Ordnance in the Muzzle-Loading Era, by Spencer Tucker, reviewed, L, 145.
Armistead, Elizabeth Mosely, L, 245 ff.
Arnold, III, J. Barto, review by, XLIX, 313.
Arnold, Craig, edited, *"Euterpe," Diaries, Letters and Logs of the "Star of India," as a British Emigrant Ship*, reviewed, L, 151.
Aroostook, tender *(1919)*, XLVII, 253.
Arrowsmith, Captain Thomas, XLVIII, 34.
Arthur, Charles B., *The Remaking of the English Navy by Admiral St. Vincent—Key to the Victory Over Napoleon*, reviewed, XLVIII, 190.
Ashanti, HMS ship *(1942)*, L, 49.
Ashuelot, steamer *(1869)*, XLIX, 25.
Asiatic Petroleum and Butterfield & Swire, L, 260 ff.
Aspinwall, Captain John, XLVIII, 33.
Aspinwall, Mark D., 'Passenger Ships in the Coastwise Trade: American Public Policy Since 1789,' XLVIII, 173-177.
Aspinwall, William H., XLVIII, 114.
Association for Asian Studies, Raleigh, NC, XLVIII, 224.
Astice, Lt. Commander, R.W., L, 49.
Astor, John Jacob, XLVI, 32; XLVIII, 246.
Astrea, ship *(1796)*, XLVII, 124.
'At the Sign of the Quadrant The Navigational Instrument Business in America to the Civil War,' by Deborah Jean Warner, XLVI, 258-263.
Atlanta, Confederate ironclad *(1863)*, XLIX, 116.
Atlantic Four-Master: The Story of the Schooner Herbert L. Rawding, *1919-1947*, reviewed, XLVIII, 193.
Atlantic Neptune, marine atlas of charts, XLVI, 173 ff.
Atlantic Ocean chart of C. H. Townsend, L, 121.
Atlantic, steamship *(1849)*, XLVIII, 113.
Atlas, ship *(1818)*, L, 213.
Atlas of Lake Champlain, 1779-1780, by Capt. William Chambers, R.N., reviewed, XLVII, 211.
Audrey, brigantine *(1757)*, XLVIII, 38 ff.
August II, Freidrich, King of Saxony, XLIX, 226-229 ff.
Augusta, brig *(1799)*, XLVI, 161 ff.
Augusta W. Snow, brig *(1905)*, XLIX, 31.
Augustine Heard & Company, XLIX, 21 ff.
Austin, Captain, XLVIII, 240.
Austin, Chaplain William, XLVI, 163.
Australia Station: A History of the Royal Navy in the South West Pacific, 1821-1913, The, by John Bach, XLIX, 307.
Avon, brig *(1848)*, XLVII, 93.

Babbage, Charles, XLVII, 177.
Bach, John, *The Australia Station: A History of the Royal Navy in the South West Pacific, 1821-1913*, reviewed, XLIX, 307.
Bache, Alexander Dallas, XLVII, 177; XLVIII, 44 ff.
Bache, Lt. Richard, XLVII, 175.
Backus, Elijah, L, 201 ff.
Baden-Powell, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Baffin, William, L, 35.
Bai Ling, Governor-general, XLVIII, 240.
Bainbridge, ship *(1844)*, XLVI, 234.
Bainbridge, William, XLVII, 20; L, 245 ff.
Baird, Dr. Spencer F., XLIX, 34 ff.
Baker, William A., *The Lore of Sail*, reviewed, XLVII, 142.
Balestier, Joseph, U.S. consul, XLVII, 172.
Baltick, schooner *(1765)* rigging plan of, XLIX, 201.
Baltimore, cruiser *(1919)*, XLVII, 252.
Bancroft, George C., Secretary of the Navy, XLVII, 172; L, 109.
Banks, Sir Joseph, XLIX, 151.
Banryu Maru, steamer, (ex-*Emperor*), *(1858)*, XLIX, 26.
Barbour, Captain Charles H., XLIX, 29.
Barnes, Albert M., in memory of, XLVIII, 66.
Baron of Renfrew, steamer *(1825)*, XLVIII, 77 ff., illustration of stranding, XLVIII, 84.
Barrell, John, XLVIII, 26.
Barrin Island map, XLIX, 16.
Barron, Commodore James, XLVII, 20; L, 245 ff.
Barry, Commodore John, XLVI, 159 ff.
Barslow, Thomas, XLVI, 9 ff.
Bart, Rear-Admiral Sir Michael Seymour, L, 32.
Barthelmess, Klaus, "Legacy of a Saxon King: Royal Prints of Whale Strandings in the Peabody Museum," XLIX, 226-229.
Bartlett, Bailey, XLVI, 143.
Bartlett, Major Henry A., XLIX, 298 ff.
Basch, Jal, writer, L, 193.
Basch, Lucien, review by, L, 63.
Bass, George, mention, XLVII, 281.
Batchelor, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Bates, John, XLVI, 175.
Battle at sea, early fourteenth century, XLVI, 98.
"Battle for Convoy TM 1, January 1943, The," by David Syrett, L, 42-50.
Battleships in Transition: The Creation of the Steam Battlefleet 1815-1860, by Andrew Lambert, reviewed, XLVI, 129.
Bauer, K. Jack and Paolo E. Coletta, *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Domestic*, and *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Foreign*, reviewed, XLIX, 59.
Baury, Midshipman Frederick, XLVII, 16.
Baxter, James Phinney, XLIX, 115.
Bayard, William, portrait of, XLVI, 154.
Bayou City, steamboat *(1862)*, XLVIII, 92.
Beacon Oil Company, XLVII, 47.
Beadle, Charles, XLVII, 122.
Beagle, H.M.S. ship *(1825)*, L, 32.

Beals, Herbert K., editor, *For Honor and Country, the Diary of Bruno de Hezeta*, reviewed, XLVIII, 197.
Beatrice L. Corkum, Canadian ship *(1902)*, XLIX, 279.
Beaverton, Great Lakes freighter *(1933)*, L, 35.
Beavis, L.R.W., *Passage from Sail to Steam*, reviewed, XLIX, 63.
Bedford, ship *(1812)*, XLVI, 168.
Bedini, Silvio, XLVI, 260.
Bee, HMS gunboat *(1930)*, L, 188.
Bell, Thomas, XLVI, 8 ff.
Bell, Jr., William, L, 203.
Bellinger, Patrick N.L., L, 54.
Bender, Bert, 'Jack London in the Tradition of American Sea Fiction,' XLVI, 188-199.
Benin, SS (1898), XLVI, 105.
Benjamin F. Packard, ship *(1883)*, XLVII, 131.
Benson, Admiral William S., XLVII, 255; L, 56.
Benton, Senator Thomas Hart, XLIX, 109.
Berg, Lt. Hans, XLVIII, 50 ff.
Bernstrosse, Danish ship *(1798)*, L, 270 ff.
Bessemer Steel Company, XLVIII, 129.
Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, by Marcus Rediker, reviewed, XLVIII, 61.
Bhagat, G., 'Americans and American Trade in India, 1784-1814,' XLVI, 6-15.
Biddle, Commodore James, XLVII, 28; XLIX, 112.
Bien Aimé, British ship *(1747)*, XLVIII, 28.
Bigelow, Dr. Jacob, XLVI, 213.
Bigelow, William Sturgis, XLVI, 56 ff.
Biggs, Thomas, XLVI, 260.
Biles, Professor John H., XLVII, 198.
Bill for construction of steamboat, May 1790, photo of, L, 203.
Bingham, Rev. Hiram, XLVI, 46.
Bingham, ship *(1806)*, XLVIII, 248 ff.
Bingley, Sir Ralph, XLVII, 77 ff.
Birdseye, Clarence, XLVII, 268.
Bird's-eye View of Tynemouth, 1673, L, 20, 22.
Bismark, German battleship *(1941)*, L, 131.
Bittern, British sloop of war *(1795)*, XLIX, 45.
Black, Jeremy and Philip Woodfine, *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century*, reviewed, XLIX, 314.
Blackledge, Richard, XLIX, 84 ff.
Blackledge, Singleton & Company, XLIX, 84.
Black Swan, British cruiser *(1949)*, XLIX, 221; L, 291 ff.
Blackwood, John G., XLVIII, 89.
Bliss, Hezekiah, XLVIII, 112.
Blok, Dutch ship *(1783)*, XLVII, 245.
Blue Star, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Blume, Kenneth J., review by, L, 139, 233.
Blunt, Edmund B., XLVI, 260.
Blythwoode, steamer *(1870)*, XLIX, 24.
Boelen, Jacobus, *A Merchant's Perspective: Captain Jacobus Boelen's Narrative of his Visit to Hawai'i in 1828*, reviewed, XLIX, 135.
Boerner, C. G., mention, XLIX, 226.
Bomford, Colonel, XLVII, 117.
Bonhomme Richard, French ship (ex-*Duc de Duras*) (1765), XLVI, 184 ff.
Books Received, XLVII, 138-140; XLVIII, 59.
Book Reviews, XLVI, 120, 200, 269; XLVII, 54, 141, 211, 286; XLVIII, 61, 131, 186; XLIX, 59, 133, 232, 305; L, 63, 138.
Boscawen, three-decker ship (1748), XLVII, 243 ff.
Boston, USS *(1805)*, L, 60.
Boston, frigate (1799), XLVI, 151 ff.
Boston, frigate *(1777)*, XLVIII, 160, oil painting of, XLVIII, 161.
Boston Packet, ship *(1748)*, XLVIII, 34.
Boston, ship *(1748)*, XLVIII, 25.
Boston Tow-Boat Company, XLVII, 126.
Bowditch, Nathaniel, XLVI, 263.
Bowker, Captain Francis E., *Atlantic Four-Master: The Story of the Schooner* Herbert L. Rawding, *1919-1947*, reviewed, XLVIII, 193.
Bowles, Commodore William, L, 30.
Boyd, Norman, *The Discovery of Ship Models*, reviewed, XLVII, 59.
Boyle, Commander R.C., L, 44.
Bradford, (ex-Ewing) gunboat *(1862)*, XLVIII, 87 ff.
Bradford, James C., editor, *Command Under Sail: Makers of the American Naval Tradition*, reviewed, XLVI, 122.
Bradford, James C., review by, XLIX, 59.
Bradford, James C., *Captains of the Old Steam Navy: Makers of the American Naval Tradition, 1840-1880*, reviewed, XLIX, 61.
Braisted, William R., review by, L, 150.
Braynard, Frank O., reviews by, L, 139, 140, 145.
Bremen cog, ca. 1350, photograph of, XLVI, 94, 95.
Brent, Captain Thomas W., XVIII, 94.
Brent, Jr., Chargé d'Affaires, William, XLVI, 235.
Breshwood, Captain John G., XLVIII, 87.
Brewer, David, XLVI, 220.
Brewington, Marion, XLIX, 46 ff.
Bridges, Robert, XLVIII, 252.
Bridgman, Elijah Coleman, XLVI, 34 ff.; XLVIII, 274 ff.
'Bridgman in China in the Early Nineteenth Century,' by Frederick W. Drake, XLVI, 34-42.
Brighton, Ray, *Clippers of the Port of Portsmouth and the Men Who Built Them*, reviewed, XLVIII, 197.
Brind, Admiral, L, 291 ff.
British patent specifications for a water-driven hopper mill, 1790 drawing of, L, 205.
British Coasting Vessel, Table I, XLVIII, 6.
British Dominion, tanker *(1942)*, L, 48.
British East India Company, XLVIII, 244 ff.
British and Japanese Ships Entering Chinese Ports, Table I, L, 190.
British Lake Ontario squadron, sketch of, XLIX, 265.
British Navy and the American Revolution, The, by John A. Tilley, reviewed, XLIX, 317.
British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century, The, by Jeremy Black and Philip Woodfine, reviewed, XLIX, 314.
British Vigilance, tanker *(1942)*, L, 44.
Brittania, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Broadley, Captain Housman, XLIX, 264 ff.
Broeze, Frank, review by, L, 70.
Brouwer, Norman J., *International Register of Historic Ships*, reviewed, XLVII, 216.
Brown Brothers & Company, XLVIII, 115.
Brown Hall, ship *(1775)*, XLVII, 7.
Browning, Spencer, XLVI, 261.
Brownlee, Edward G., reviews by, XLVI, 130; XLVII, 57; XLVIII, 198; XLIX, 317.
Brownlee, Walter, *The First Ships Round the World*, reviewed, XLVI, 125.
Bruce, Frederick, British Minister in China, L, 178.
Bruïjn, J. R., I. Schöffer, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, reviewed, XLVIII, 206.
Bruïjn, Jaap R., "The Dutch East India Company as Shipowner, 1602-1796," XLVII, 240-48.
Bruun, Dr. Anton, XLVI, 220.
Bruyns, Willem F. J. Mörzer, 'Matthew Fontaine Maury and the Introduction of Oceanography to the Netherlands in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' XLVIII, 44-49.
Bryant & Lee, XLVII, 100.
Buchanan, James, L, 115.
Building the Blackfish, by Dana Story, reviewed, L, 151.
Building the Wooden Fighting Ship, by James Dodds and James Moore, reviewed, XLVI, 202.
Burrows, Silas E., XLVI, 232.
Busch, Briton C., review by, XLIX, 136; L, 70.

Busch, Briton Cooper, The War against the seals: *A History of the North American seal fishery*, reviewed, XLVIII, 131.
Bush, William S., Marine Lieutenant, XLVII, 18.
Buss, ship *(1578)*, XLIX, 15.
Butler, Captain John, XLVIII, 32.
Butterworth, William John, XLVII, 172.
Byers, Edward, *The Nation of Nantucket*, reviewed, XLVIII, 188.
Byrd, Richard Evelyn, photo of, L, 56.
"Byzantine and Moslem Shipping in the Mediterranean, 500-1250," by Archibald R. Lewis, XLVII, 157-60.

C. A. Thayer, ship, XLVII, 131.
C. M. Lamson & Company, XLIX, 281 ff.
C. S. S. Florida: *Her Building and Operations, The*, by Frank Lawrence Owsley, Jr., reviewed, XLIX, 236.
Cabot, ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 158.
Cadoret, Bernard, *AR VAG*, reviewed, XLVII, 142.
Cady, Kenneth G., review by, XLIX, 62.
Cairo, ironclad gunboat *(1861)*, XLIX, 116.
Calliope, British corvetter *(1889)*, XLVI, 115.
Campbell, Lady Amelia, XLVI, 19 ff.
Campbell, Sir Archibald, XLVI, 19 ff.
Campbell, Captain Hugh G., XLVII, 27.
'Canaries as Ports of Call, The,' by Walter E. Minchinton, XLVI, 100-110.
Canberra, British cruise ship *(1980)*, XLVI, 109.
Canning, George, Secretary of State, L, 29 ff.
Canova, ship *(1823)*, XLVII, 90.
Canton Factories, map of, XLVIII, 263.
'Cape Ann Visits of the Great Sea-Serpent (1639-1886),' by Ralph W. Dexter, XLVI, 213-220.
Captain's Best Mate: The Journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence on the Whaler Addison *1856-1860*, The, by Stanton Garvey, reviewed, XLVIII, 201.
Captain From Connecticut: The Life and Naval Times of Isaac Hull, by Linda M. Maloney, reviewed, XLIX, 238.
Capt. Gray's, ship *(1672)*, L, 21.
Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates, by Robert C. Ritchies, reviewed, XLVII, 282.
Captain Nat Herreshoff, by L. Francis Herreshoff, reviewed, XVIII, 186.
'Captains and Diplomats Americans in the Río de la Plata, 1843-1846,' by Robert W. Randall, XLVI, 230-239.
Captains of the Old Steam Navy: Makers of the American Naval Tradition, 1840-1880, by James C. Bradford, reviewed, XLIX, 61.
Capt. Vicar's, ship *(1672)*, L, 21.
Carlson, Captain Carl. H., L, 260 ff.
Carrington, Edward, XLVII, 248.
Carroll, Richard, XLVII, 52.
Carter, Commander John C., XLVIII, 97 ff.
Cartwright, George, L, 36.
Cascade, brig *(1850)*, painting of, XLVII, 94.
Casson, Lionel, "Rome's Maritime Trade with the Far East," XLVIII, 149-153; *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, reviewed, 63; reviews by, XLVI, 121; XLVIII, 200
Castle of Patrick Stewart, photo of, L, 128.
Castro, João de, L, 281.
Catskill, armored vessel *(1862)*, XLVIII, 122.
Cavendish, Henry, Earl of Ogle, L, 24.
Centennial Exhibition, 1876, illustration of, XLVII, 180.
Central Rail Road and Banking Company of Georgia, XLVII, 34.
Central Rail Road and Canal Company, XLVII, 34.
Chadwick, Lt. Commander French E., XLIX, 295.
Chamberlain, Sir Austen, L, 188.
Chambers, Arthur and George, XLVII, 77.
Chambers, Capt. William, *Atlas of Lake Champlain, 1779-1780*, reviewed, XLVII, 211.
Champion of Sail: R. W. Leyland and his Shipping Line, by David Walker, reviewed, XLVII, 213.
Chance, schooner *(1810)*, L, 104 ff.
Chandler, William E., Secretary of the Navy, XLIX, 302.
Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century, by Lewis R. Fischer and Gerald E. Panting, reviewed, XLVII, 64.
Chanticleer, steamer *(1865)*, XLIX, 22.
Chapelle, Howard, XLVI, 152; XLIX, 39 ff.
Charleston's Navy Yard: a picture history, by Jim McNeil, reviewed, XLVIII, 206.
Charlotte A. Littlefield, barque, *(1882)*, XLVI, 111.
Charlotte Dundas, model of William Symington's 1802 steamboat, photo, L, 208.
Charming Betsy, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
'Charter Party of the *Triall:* An Unsuccessful Virginia Venture, 1606-1607, The,' by John C. Appleby, XLVII, 77-82.
Charts and Coastal Views of Captain Cook's Voyages. The Voyage of the Endeavor *1768-1771, Hakluyt Society Extra Series No. 43, The*, by Andrew David, Rudiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, reviewed, XLIX, 318.
Chatham, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
Chauncey, Isaac, XLVII, 27.
Cherokee, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
Chesapeake, frigate *(1790)*, XLIX, 41 ff.; L, 60.
Chesapeake and Delaware Canal Company, XLVIII, 112.
Chester, cruiser *(1921)*, L, 54.
Chew, Purser Thomas, XLVII, 15.
Chiang Kai-shek, XLVIII, 283.
Chichester, Sir Arthur, XLVII, 77 ff.
China Trade Museum, Milton, MA, XLVI, 32.
'China's New Historical Archives,' by Frederic Wakeman, Jr., XLVIII, 283-285.
Chinese Military guard post on Grand Canal, 1793-94, photo of, XLVIII, 232.
Chinese Repository, Christian publication XLVI, 38 ff.; XLVIII, 217 ff.
Chinese text of Petition of Consequa, Canton, 1814, photo of, XLVIII, 255.
Chinnery, George, portrait by of Benjamin Chew Wilcocks, photo of, XLVIII, 248.
Choate, George W., XLVI, 261.
Christie, John, review by, XLVII, 141.
Churchill Barriers, Scapa Bay, photos of, L, 130-131.
City of Boston, steamboat (1861), XLVIII, 119.
City of Merida, steamship *(1869)*, XLVIII, 127.
City of New York, steamboat (1862), XLVIII, 119.
City of Peking, steamship *(1873)*, XLVI, 62.
City of Tokio, ship *(1877)*, 61. Painting of ship, XLVI, 62.
Cixi, Empress Dowager, XLVIII, 284.
Clan MacTavish, British ship, (1916), XLVIII, 50 ff.
Clapham, Sir Joh, XLVIII, 11.
Clara E. McGilvery, barkentine (1873), photo of, XLVI, 112.
Clarion, propeller-driven ship *(1840)*, XLVIII, 117.
Claxton, Commodore Alexander, XLVI, 231.
Clay, Henry, XXLVIII, 27.
Cleopatra's Barge, ship, (1816), L, 214.
Cleveland, German steamer *1910)*, XLVIII, 175.
Cleveland, William, XLVI, 53.
Clinton, Sir Henry, XLVI, 23.
Clio, British sloop-of-war, *(1833)*, L, 31.
'Cliometrics: Its Application to Nautical Research,' by Norman N. Rubin, XLVI, 179-187.
Chona, tanker *(1942)*, L, 44.
Clippers of the Port of Portsmouth and the Men Who Built Them, by Ray Brighton, reviewed, XLVIII, 197.
Cloud, Reverend Fred, XLVI, 25.
Clyde steamers, reference to, XLVIII, 77.

Coates, John and Sean McGrail, editors, *The Greek Trireme of the 5th Century B.C.: Discussion of a Projected Reconstruction*, reviewed, XLVI, 121.
Cockchafer, HMS frigate *(1926)*, L, 187.
Cohn, Michael B., review by, XLVI, 124.
Cohoes, monitor *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Colcord, Joanna Carver, XLVI, 111 ff.
Colcord, Lincoln Alden, XLVI, 111.
Cole, Charles H., Confederate Captain, XLVIII, 101.
Coles, Captain Cowper, XLIX, 115.
Cole, Captain George A., XLVII, 43.
Cole, Merle T., 'Tankers in the Patuxent: The ESSO Fleet Lay-up Site in the 1930s,' , XLVII, 45-53.
Coletta, Paolo E. and K. Jack Bauer, *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Domestic*, and *United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Foreign*, reviewed, XLIX, 59.
Coletta, Paolo E. "Pat Bellinger and the May 1919 Transsatlantic Flight," XLVII, 249-256; *An Annotated Bibliography of U.S. Marine Corps History*, reviewed, 214; "Creating the U.S. Bureau of Aeronautics," L, 51-59.
Collectors Stamp, Freidrich August, photo of, XLIX, 226.
Colledge, Caroline Shillaber, XLVI, 37.
Collingwood, Admiral, XLVI, 222.
Collins, Edward Knight, XLVII, 39; XLVIII,114.
Collins, James P., XLVI, 216.
Collins, Captain John, XLVII, 39.
Colorado, screw frigate *(1850)*, XLIX, 112.
Colorado, steam side-wheeler *(1867)*, XLVI, 61.
Columbia, frigate *(1837)*, XLVII, 29.
Columbia, ship *(1792)*, XLIX, 272 ff.
Columbia, ship (ex-*Great Northern) (1922)* XLVII, 203.
Columbia, steamer (re-named *Otoril Taiho Maru, (1850)*, XLIX, 27.
Columbus, ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 158.
Columbus, steamer *(1825)*, 77 ff. illustrations of, XLVIII, 79, 81, 82, 83.
Comet, steamboat *(1811)*, XLVIII, 77.
Commager, Henry Steele, mention, XLVIII, 181.
Command Under Sail: Makers of the American Naval Tradition, by James C. Bradford, reviewed, XLVI, 122.
'Commerce, Crisis, Coercion: The Role of Piracy in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Sino-Western Relations,' by Dian Murray, XLVIII, 237-242.
Commerce and Culture. The Maritime Communities of Colonia Massachusetts 1690-1750, by Christine Leigh Heyman, reviewed, XLVI, 128.
Commerce of a Southern Port: New Bern, North Carolina, 1783 to 1789, The, by William Stuart Morgan, III, XLIX, 77-90.
Commodore Jones, river gunboat *(1864)*, XLIX, 121.
Concord, USS cruiser *(1926)*, XLVI, 240 ff.; L, 291 ff.
Condy, Benjamin, XLVI, 259.
Coney, Captain Lawrence, XLIX, 31.
Confederacy, frigate *(1790)*, XLIX, 41 ff.
Confucius, ship *(1853)*, XLIX, 21.
Congress, frigate *(1813)*, 165, 233; XLIX, 49; L, 60.
Connecticut, steamboat *(1850)*, XLVIII, 119.
Connor, Master Commandant David, XLVII, 29.
Conover, Commander Thomas A., XLVI, 252; XLVII, 30.
Consequa Pan Zhangyao (P'an Chang-yao). Chinese merchant, XLVIII, 243 ff.
Consequa's letter to Peter Dobell, 1812, photo of, XLVIII, 253.
Consort, HMS, British destroyer *(1949)*, L, 291 ff.
Constellation, frigate *(1812)*, XLVI, 114, 147; XLVII, 28; XLIX, 43; L, 60 ff.
Constitution, frigate *(1798)*, XLVI, 147 ff., photo of, 160; XLVII, 14, 169 ff.
Constitution and *Guerriere*, sketch of action, XLVII, 15.
Constitution, Pacific Mail steampship *(1861)*, XLVIII, 120.
Conte di Savoia, Italian lifeboat, *(1934)*, XLVII, 51.
Continental Iron Works, XLVIII, 119.
Convoy SC 130, L, 219 ff.
Convoy T.M. 1, map of, L, 43.
Cook, Frederick Albert, L, 35.
Cook, Captain James, XLVI, 28; XLIX, 151; L, 28.
Coombs, William, XLVI, 155.
Cooney, Jerry W., 'Doing Business in the Smuggling Way' Yankee Contraband in the Río de la Plata, XLVII, 162-168.
Cooney, Jerry W., "Trials of a Yankee Sailor: Robert Gray in the Río de la Plata, 1798-1802," XLIX, 272-277.
Coontz, Robert E., L, 53 ff.
Cooper, James Fenimore, XLVI, 188 ff.; L, 60, 212.
Cooper, Peter, L, 204.
Cooper, Adj. Gen. Samuel, XLVIII, 91.
Coquette, schooner *(1846)*, XLVII, 121.
Corbett, Sir Julian, XLVIII, 12; XLIX, 5.
Corea, steamer *(1865)*, XLIX, 22.
Corlett, Ewan, *The Iron Ship: The Story of Brunel's SS Great Britain*, reviewed, L, 230.
Corlis, Captain John, XLVI, 215.
Cornè, Michel Felicé, painting by, XLVI, 160; XLVII, 15.
Cornelius H. Delamater Iron Works, XLVIII, 117.
Cornelisz, Jan, L, 285.
Cornish, Dudley Taylor and Virginia Jeans Laas, *Lincoln's Lee; The Life of Samuel Phillips Lee, United States Navy, 1812-1897*, XLVIII, reviewed, 192.
Cornwallis, Governor, XLVIII, 28.
Cornwallis, 1st Marquis, XLVI, 18 ff.
'Cornwallis in India and the American Experience,' by Franklin B. Wickwire, XLVI, 18-24.
Corinthian war vessel, ca. 575, photo of, L, 197.
Corwith Cramer, ship *(1971)*, XLVII, 206.
Cory Brothers, XLVI, 105.
Cossack, HMS, British cruiser, *(1949)*, L, 291 ff.
Coste, Captain Napoleon L., XLVIII, 89.
Countess of Sussex Mine, Baffin Island, photo of rock slices, XLIX, 18.
Cowden, James E. and John O'C. Duffy, *The Elder Dempster Fleet History, 1852-1985*, reviewed, XLVIII, 193.
Coxhoorn, Dutch ship *(1731)*, XLVII, 245.
Crane, Stephen, XLVI, 188.
Crane, Captain William, XLIX, 106.
Cranmer, Clarkson A., XLIX, 49 ff.
Craven, brig *(1789)*, XLIX, 89.
Craven, Captain Thomas T., L, 51, photo of 53.
Crawford, Michael J., 'The Navy's Campaign against the Licensed Trade in the War of 1812,' XLVI, 165-172.
Crawford, U.S. revenue cutter *(1861)*, XLVIII, 91.
"Creating the U.S. Bureau of Aeronautics," by Paolo E. Coletta, L, 51-59.
Cricket, steamer (ex-*Ly-ee-moon), (1861)*, XLIX, 26.
Criminal trial of *Neptune* sailors, Canton, 1807, photo of, XLVIII, 244.
Crocker, S. Sturgis, XLVIII, 182 ff.
Cross, Captain George, XLVII, 24 ff.
Crown, ship *(1679)*, L, 129.
Crowninshield, Benjamin, XLVI, 11 ff.
Crowninshield, Jacob, XLVI, 11.
Crowninshield, Captain John, XLVI, 12, 142.
Crowninshield, or 'India Wharf' view of, between, XLVI, 15-16.
Crumlin-Pedersen, Ole and Max Vinner, *Sailing into the Past*, review by, XLVIII, 205.
Crusaders, XLVI, 77 ff.
Cumberland, warship *(1861)*, XLIX, 114 ff.
Cumberland Blaze, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.

Cushing, Caleb, XLVI, 37.
Cushing, John P., XLVI, 216.
Custis, Daniel Parke, L, 18.
Custis, Edmund, L, 18 ff.
Custis II, Major General John, L, 18.
Custis, Thomas, L, 24.
Cyane, frigate *(1821)*, XLVII, 28;†XLIX, 43 ff.
Cyane, Tables of armament, XLIX, 56, 57.

Dacres, Captain James Richard, XLVII, 16 ff.
Dahlgren, Commander John, XLVII, 112; XLIX, 111.
Dahlgren gun carriage, ordnance instructions, illustration, XLVII, 118.
Daily United States Mail Steam Packet Line, XLVII, 35.
Dainty Kate, pinnace *(1628)*, XLIX, 258.
Dairy Maid, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
Dakota, ship (1904), XLVII, 199.
Dale, John B., XLVII, 173.
Dale, Commodore Richard, L, 245 ff.
Dana & Company, XLVII, 106.
Dana, James Dwight, XLIX, 151.
"Dangerous Sport: A Boston Boy's Life at Sea, 1820-1837, A," by Alan Rogers, L, 211-218.
Daniels, Josephus, Secretary of the Navy, XLVII, 255; L, 51.
Dann, John C., *The Nagle Journal[:] A Diary of the Life of Jacob Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775 to 1841*, edited by, L, 65.
Darwin, Charles, XLVI, 61.
Davenport, William, XLVI, 261.
David, Andrew, Rudiger Joppien and Bernard Smith, *The Charts and Coastal Views of Captain Coo's Voyages. The Voyage of the* Endeavor, *1768-1771, Hakluyt Society Extra Series No. 43*, reviewed, XLIX, 318.
Davids, Karel A., "Finding Longitude at Sea by Magnetic Declination on Dutch East Indiamen, L, 281-290.
Davis, Captain J. L., XLVII, 181 ff.
Davis, Senator John, XLVII, 87.
Deal, Captain James, XLVI, 53.
Dean Brothers, XLVII, 93.
Dean Emery, tanker *(1940)*, XLVII, 52.
Dean, Nicholas, review by, XLVI, 201; XLIX, 236.
Deane's Doctrine of Naval Architecture 1670, by Brian Lavery, reviewed, XLVIII, 198.
Decatur, Jr., Commodore Stephen, L, 245 ff.
Decatur, Stephen, XLVI, 156 ff.; XLVII, 20, L-245 ff.
DeCosta, Benjamin F., L, 9 ff.
Delamater, Iron Works, XLVIII, 116.
Delaney Forge and Iron Company, XLVIII, 109 ff.
Delaware, schooner *(1821)*, L, 211 ff.
Delaware and Hudson Coal Company, XLVIII, 112.
Delaware, Lackawanna & Western Railroad, XLVII, 193 ff.
Delaware and Raritan Canal Company, XLVIII, 118.
Delgado, James P., 'Steamers to Savannah: The Origins and Establishment of the New-York and Savannah Steam Navigation Company,' XLVII 33-44.
Delphin group, U-boats *(1942)*, L, 45.
Dennet, Jeremiah, XLVI, 169.
Deptford Dockyard, XLVII, 8 ff.
Derby, Elias Hasket, XLVI, 9 ff.
Derby, Richard, XLVI, 9 ff.
Derby, Captain Samuel G., XLVI, 53.
Destroyer, torpedo boat *(1869)*, XLVIII, 127.
Deutschland, German submarine *(1916)*, XLVIII, 57.
Devereux, Captain James, XLVI, 51.
Devil Himself: The Mutiny of 1800, The, by Dudley Pope, reviewed, XLIX, 235.
Dexter, Ralph W., 'Cape Ann Visits of the Great Sea-Serpent (1639-1886),' XLVI, 213-220.
Dexter, Ralph W., "Essex County and the Development of American Marine Biology," 34-38; review by XLIX, 318.
Dexter, Samuel, XLVI, 217.
Dey, Ramdoolal, Calcutta, XLVI, 15.
Dickinson, A. B., "Southern Hemisphere Fur Sealing from Atlantic Canada," XLIX, 278-290.
Dickson, Captain E. B., XLIX, 32.
Dictator, ironclad vessel *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Dinant, 1870, photo of, L, 169.
Dione, S. Crocker yacht, (1964), XLVIII, 184.
Director, Canadian ship *(1894)*, XLIX, 278.
Dirigo, ship *(1912)*, photo of, XLVI, 189.
Discoverer, ship *(1602)*, L, 9.
Discovery, Captain Cook's ship *(1870)*, L, 128.
Discovery of Ship Models, The, by Norman Boyd, reviewed, XLVII, 59.
Dispatch, British sloop, *(1746)*, XLVIII, 26.
Dix. John A., XLVIII, 89.
Dixon, Rear Admiral Sir Manley, L, 30 ff.
Dobbin, USS *(1926)*, XLVI, 240 ff.
Dobbins, James C., Secretary of the Navy, L, 109.
Dobell, Peter, XLVIII, 253 ff.
Dodds, James and James Moore, *Building the Wooden Fighting Ship*, reviewed, XLVI, 202.
Dodson, James, L, 288.
Dohna-Schlodien, Captain, XLVIII, 50 ff.
'Doing Business in the Smuggling Way' Yankee Contraband in the Río de la Plata, by Jerry W. Cooney, XLVII, 162-168.
Dolan, Charles A., XLIX, 31.
Dollar, Robert, L, 260 ff.
Dolphin, USS *(1826)*, XLVI, 45.
Donitz, Karl, Grand Admiral, Commander-in-Chief German Navy, L, 219 ff.
Donnelly, Ralph W., 'Revenue Marine Service: The Nucleus of the Confederate Navy,' XLVIII, 87-95.
van Doornick, Jr., F. H., review by, XLVI, 200.
Dotson, John E., 'Naval Strategy in the First Genoese-Venetian War, 1257-1270,' XLVI, 84-90; review by, XLVII, 216.
Douglas, James, XLVI, 51.
Dover, British warship *(1760)*, XLVIII, 39 ff.
Dow, George Francis, *Whale Ships and Whaling: A Pictorial History*, reviewed, L, 138.
Downes, Captain John, XLVI, 114; XLVII, 172.
Dragon, British ship *(1606)*, XLVII, 77 ff.
Drake, Frederick W., 'Bridgman in China in the Early Nineteenth Century,' XLVI, 34-42.
Drake, Frederick C., *The Empire of the Seas: a Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN*, reviewed, XLVI, 123.
Drake, Kirby, XLVI, 165.
Drake, Sir Francis, XLIX, 5.
Dreadnought, British battleship, *(1837)*, L, 33.
Duane, William, XLVI, 7 ff.
Dublin, frigate *(1833)*, L, 32.
Dudley, William S., *The Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History*, I, reviewed, XLVII, 214; review by, L, 229.
Duer, William, XLVI, 28.
Duffy, John O'C. and James E. Cowden, *The Elder Dempster Fleet History, 1852-1985*, reviewed, XLVIII, 193.
"Duhamel du Monceau: *Savant* and Naval Architect," by Victor A. Lewinson, L, 132-137.
Duhamel du Monceau, Henri-Louis, L, 132 ff.; portrait of, 133.
Dull, Jonathan R., review by, XLVVIII, 195; XLIX, 315; L, 143.
Duncan, HMS destroyer *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Duncan, Commissioner Henry, XLVI, 223.
Duncan, Roger F., *Friendship Sloops*, reviewed, XLIX, 237.
Duncan, Commander Silas, XLVI, 230.
Dunderberg, ram *(1865)*, XLIX, 117.
Dunne, W.M.P., "The South Carolina Frigate: A History of the U.S. Ship *John Adams*," XLVII, 22-32; review by, XLVIII, 196; "An In-

quiry into H.I. Chapelle's Research in Naval History," XLIX, 39-55; review by, 310.
Dunne, William M. P., "Pistols and Honor: The James Barron-Stephen Decatur Conflict, 1798-1807," L, 245 ff.
DuPont, Rear Admiral Samuel F., XLIX, 116; L, 89.
Durand-Brager, Jean-Baptiste Henri, XLVI, 255.
Durand, H. XLVI, 254 ff.
Durga, Indian Goddess, statue of, between XLVI, 15-16.
Dutch Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries, by J. R. Bruijn and I. Schöffer, reviewed, XLVIII, 206.
Dutch East India Company, XLVIII, 261 ff.
"Dutch East India Company as Shipowner, 1602-1796, The," by Jaap R. Bruijn, XLVII, 240-248.
Dutch shallops, sketches of, XLIX, 202.
Dwight, Timothy, XLVIII, 272.

E. B. Marvin, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
E. H. Green, steamer (ex-*Unicorn*), *(1858)*, XLIX, 26.
E. Nickerson, whaleship *(1856)*, L, 123.
Eagle, Spanish steamship *(1838)*, XLVIII, 112.
Early nineteenth century Chinese contract for sale of Minbei tea, photo of, XLVIII, 266, 267.
East India Company, XLVI, 18 ff.; XLVII, 6 ff.; XLVIII, 24.
East India Marine Society, mention, between XLVI, 15-16.
Eastern Railway Company of Minnesota, XLVII, 193 ff.
Eastern Yacht Club. A History from 1870-1985, The, by Joseph E. Garland, reviewed, L, 66.
Eastport Salt Works, XLVII, 87.
Ebbets, John, XLVI, 46.
Eclipse, ship *(1838)*, XLVII, 29.
Edith, ship *(1844)*, XLIX, 21.
Edith R. Balcom, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
"Edmund Custis and His 'Wreck-Fishing' Invention," by James B. Lynch, Jr., L, 18-25.
Edson, Jr., Merritt A., "The Schooner Rig, Its First Appearance and Development," XLIX, 198-207.
Edward Johnston, British ship *(1853)*, XLVII, 101.
Edward Roy, Canadian ship *(1902)*, XLIX, 279.
Edward Stewart, schooner *(1883)*, XLIX, 30 ff.
Edwards, Consul Amory, XLVI, 238.
Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, XLVIII, 272.
Elder-Dempster, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Elder Dempster Fleet History, 1852-1985, The, by James E. Cowden and John O'C. Duffy, reviewed, XLVIII, 193.
Eleanor, Baltimore letter of marque, *(1812)*, XLVI, 168.
Elisha Walker, tanker *(1940)*, XLVII, 52.
Eliza, ship (1797), 50 ff. Chinese painting of ship *Eliza*, XLVI, 52; L, 270 ff.
Elizabeth, schooner *(1799)*, XLVI, 161; *(1821)*, L, 105.
Eller, Rear Admiral Ernest M., XLIX, mention, 43, review by, 133; L, review by, 230.
Ellery, Epes, XLVI, 214.
Elliot, Captain Charles, XLVIII, 281.
Elliott, Clark, XLVI, 258.
Elliot, Major George, XLVII, 178.
Ellis and Brook, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
Ellis, CSS, *(1862)*, XLVIII, 95.
Ellsworth, brig *(1834)*, L, 217.
Elsie, tug *(1887)*, XLVII, 116.
Elsinore, ship, XLVI, 195 ff.
Elton, Lieutenant John, XLVI, 169.
Emden, German raider *(1917)*, XLVIII, 53.
Emlen, George, XLVIII, 247 ff.
Emanuel, ship *(1578)*, XLIX, 14 ff.
"*Emanuel* of Bridgwater and Discovery of Martin Frobisher's 'Black Ore' in Ireland, The," by Donald D. Hogarth, XLIX, 14-20.
Emerald, HMS cruiser *(1927)*, L, 187.
Emmons, Frederick E., *American Passenger Ships: The Ocean Lines and Liners, 1873-1983*, reviewed, XLVII, 55.
Emperor Frederick II, XLVI, 88.
Emperor Guangxu, XLVIII, 284.
Emperor of Japan, brig *(1800)*, XLVI, 52.
Emperor Kangxi, XLVIII, 233.
Empire Lytton, tanker *(1942)*, L, 44.
Empire of the Seas: a Biography of Rear Admiral Robert Wilson Shufeldt, USN, The, by Frederick C. Drake, reviewed, XLVI, 123.
Empress of China, ship *(1785)*, XLVI, 6 ff.
'Empress of China's Voyage, 1784-1785, The,' by Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, XLVI, 25-33.
Endeavor, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Endicott, Captain James B., XLIX, 21.
Enterprize, schooner *(1803)*, XLVII, 27; L, 245 ff.
Erebus, ship (1845), L, 128.
Ericsson, John, XLIX, 96 ff.
Erie, sloop *(1813)*, XLIX, 41 ff.
Esherick, Jr., Joseph, XLVIII, 284.
Eshing, silk merchant of Canton, portrait of, XLVI, 29.
Essex, warship (1799), XLVI, 151 ff.; L, 245 ff.
Essex Lance, merchant ship *(1943)*, L, 220 ff.
ESSO, oil company, 45 ff., illustrations of, XLVII, 50.
Esther, French privateer *(1799)*, XLVI, 162.
Ethyl, SS *(1938)*, XLVII, 49.
Euphan, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500, by Archibald R. Lewis and Timothy J. Runyan, reviewed, XLVI, 200.
"Euterpe," Diaries, Letters and Logs of the "Star of India" as a British Emigrant Ship, edited by Craig Arnold, reviewed, L, 151.
Evans, Amos A., Surgeon, XLVII, 16.
Evans, Frank B., "A Grounding in the Bahamas in 1851," XLIX, 123-125.
Evans, Samuel, XLVII, 27.
Ewing, U.S. revenue cutter *(1862)*, XLVIII, 94.
Exchange, schooner *(1820)*, XLVII, 28.
Experiment, schooner *(1799)*, XLVI, 161 ff.
Experiment, steamboat *(1825)*, XLVIII, 84.
Explosion of the 'Peace-Maker' aboard U.S. Steam Frigate *Princeton*, photo of, XLIX, 108.
Express, steamer *(1861)*, XLIX, 123.
Ezra Ames, frigate *(1799)*, XLVI, 154.

'Failure of the Li-ch'uan Hong: Litigation as a Hazard of Nineteenth Century Foreign Trade, The,' by Frederic D. Grant, Jr., XLVIII, 243-260.
Fair American, schooner *(1805)*, XLIX, 86.
Faire et Fraissenet, French shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Falconer, William, XLVI, 223.
Falkland, British warship *(1695)*, XLVIII, 23.
Falkland Islands, map of, XLIX, 279.
Fanning & Coles, New York, XLVIII, 255.
Fanny, ship *(1786)*, XLIX, 83.
Faraday, Michael, XLVII, 177.
Farley, Captain James, XLVIII, 42.
Farn, British ship *(1915)*, XLVIII, 55.
Farragut, iron ferry *(1880)*, XLVIII, 128.
Farrar, Frank R., *A Ship's Logbook*, reviewed, XLIX, 306.
Farrell, Patrick, L, 203.
Fast Sailing Ships, Their Design and Construction, 1775-1875, by David R. MacGregor, reviewed, XLIX, 315.
Fatimids, XLVI, 77 ff.
'Fatimid Navy During the Early Crusades: 1099-1124, The,' by William Hamblin, XLVI, 77-83.
Faucitt, Sir William, XLVI, 19.

Favorite, ship *(1860)*, XLVII, 100.
Felch, Cheever, XLVI, 218.
Ferguson, E. James, *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784*, reviewed, XLVII, 54.
Ferguson, Eugene F., XLIX, 49 ff.
Ferguson, Major Patrick, XLVI, 21.
Fern, steamer *(1869)*, XLVIII, 127.
Feme, Sir John, XLVII, 77.
Fetchko, Peter J., 'Salem Trading Voyages to Japan During the Early Nineteenth Century,' XLVI, 50-54; note by, L, 4.
53 Boats You Can Build, by Richard Henderson, commentator, reviewed, XLVI, 130.
Finch, Captain William C. B., XLVI, 45.
"Finding Longitude at Sea by Magnetic Declination on Dutch East Indiamen, 1596-1795," by Karel A. Davids, L, 281-290.
Firebrand, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.
Fire Dart, steamer *(1860)*, XLIX, 23.
First Ships Round the World, The, by Walter Brownlee, reviewed, XLVI, 125.
Fischer, Anton Otto, *Focs'le Days*, reviewed, XLIX, 310.
Fischer, Lewis R. and Gerald E. Panting, *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century*, reviewed, XLVII, 64.
Fisher, Redwood, XLVIII, 250.
Fishmonger's Company of London, XLVII, 77.
Fiske, RADM Bradley A., photo of, L, 54.
Fister, Lt. Thomas D., XLVIII, 89.
Fitch, John, L. 201.
FitzRoy, Captain Robert, L, 32.
Fitzsimmons, Thomas, XLVI, 155.
Fi Wan (Fei Wan) ship *(1862)*, XLIX, 21.
Fleur de la Mer, French schooner *(1798)*, L, 270 ff.
Flora, British frigate *(1778)*, L, 206; oil painting of, XLVIII, 161.
Florence M. Munsie, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Florence M. Smith, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Florida, armed schooner *(1861)*, XLVIII, 94.
Flying Fish, pilot boat *(1838)*, XLIX, 152 ff.; photo of model, XLIX, 161, 164, 165.
Focs'le Days, by Anton Otto Fischer, reviewed, XLIX, 310.
Folkstone, British ship *(1743)*, XLVIII, 23.
Forest State, ship *(1855)*, XLVII, 89.
For Honor and Country, the Diary of Bruno de Hezeta, by Herbert K. Beals, editor, reviewed, XLVIII, 197.
Fort Mechanic, XLVII, 23.
Fort Pinckney, XLVII, 23.
Fortune, ship *(1629)*, XLIX, 259.
Foster, William H., XLVI, 214.
"Founding of the Newport Naval Training Station, 1878-1883, An Exercise in Naval Politics, The," by Anthony S. Nicolosi, XLIX, 291-304.
Fowler, Jr., William M., review by, XLIX, 237, 238.
Fowler, William, review by, XLVII, 214.
Fowler, William, mention, XLVIII, 178.
Fox, ship *(1777)*, oil painting of, XLVIII, 161.
Fox, USS destroyer *(1921)*, XLVI, 246 ff.
Fox, Captain Gustavus, XLVIII, 124.
Fox Josiah, Assistant Naval Constructor, XLVII, 24; XLIX, 46.
Francis B. Ogden, screw steamer *(1837)*, XLIX, 96.
Frank Herbert, schooner *(1883)*, XLIX, 29.
Frank, Stuart M., *'Moby-Dick:* The Two 'Missing' prints by 'H. Durand', XLVI, 252-257.
Frank, Stuart M., *Herman Melville's Picture Gallery*, reviewed, XLIX, 60.
Franklin, ship *(1799)*, XLVI, 51.
Franklin, steam packet *(1840)*, XLVIII, 114.
Franklin and *Eliza*, Japanese painting of, XLVI, 53.
Franklin, Sir John, L, 35.
Frederick (Nagasaki Maru) ship, (1801), XLVI, 53.
Freeman, Captain, XLVIII, 34 ff.
Fremont, John C., XLIX, 112.
French, James, XLVI, 258.
French Lake Ontario squadron, sketch of, XLIX, 263; maps, XLIX, 269.
French Reconnaissance. Baudin in Australia 1801-1803, The, by Frank Horner, reviewed, L, 70.
"French Siege of Oswego in 1756: Inland Naval Warfare in North America, The," by D. Peter MacLeod, XLIX, 262-271.
Fresnel lens, illustration of, XLVII, 185.
Friends Goodwill, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Friendship, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Friendship, schooner *(1787)*, XLIX, 88.
Friendship, ship *(1832)*, XLVI, 114.
Friendship Sloops, by Roger F. Duncan, reviewed, XLIX, 237.
Frobisher, Sir Martin, L, 35.
Frolic, British sloop-of-war *(1820)*, L, 27 ff.; lithograph of, L, 28.
Fulton, iron ferry *(1880)*, XLVIII, 128.
Fulton II, steam frigate *(1837)*, XLIX, 98.
Fulton, Dr. George, XLVII, 207.
Fulton, Robert, XLVIII, 112.
Furer, RADM Julius A., L, 59.
Furrow, Captain, XLVIII, 36 ff.
Fuson, Robert H., *The Log of Christopher Columbus*, reviewed, XLVIII, 61.
Fychow, steamer (ex-*Nautilus*), *(1864)*, XLIX, 23.

Gabriel, ship *(1576)*, XLIX, 14.
Gaffney, Daniel, XLVI, 214.
Galena, armored warship *(1862)*, XLVIII, 121.
Gallagher, William, XLIX, 123.
Gallatin, Albert, XLVI, 148.
Ganges, ship *(1816)*, XLVIII, 250 ff.; L, 245 ff.
Ganong, William Francis, L, 5.
Gardella, Robert, 'The Antebellum Canton Tea Trade: Recent Perspectives,' XLVIII, 261-270.
Gardener, Captain Charles L., XLVI, 63.
Garland, Joseph E., *The Eastern Yacht Club. A History from 1870-1985*, reviewed, L, 66.
Gameray, Ambroise Louis, XLVI, 252 ff.
Garvey, Stanton, *The Captain's Best Mate: The Journal of Mary Chipman Lawrence on the Whaler* Addison *1856-1860*, reviewed, XLVIII, 201.
Geanakoplos, Professor Deno J., review by, XLIX, 311.
Geldermalsen, Dutch East India Company ship, *(1752)*, XLVII, 275-281.
General George S. Simonds, ship (ex-*Great Northern*, ex-*Columbia*, ex-*H. F. Alexander*) (1942), XLVII, 203.
General Greene frigate *(1799)*, XLVI, 160 ff.
General Porter, steamer *(1831)*, XLVIII, 109.
General Washington, ship *(1787)*, XLVI, 9 ff.
Genkai Maru, steamer (ex-*Hein Maru*), *(1866)*, XLIX, 22.
Genko Maru, steamer (ex-*Thames*) *(1870)*, XLIX, 26.
"Genoese Shipowners and Their Ships in the Twelfth Century," by Hilmar C. Krueger, XLVIII, 229-239.
Gentile, Gary, *Andrea Doria-Dive to An Era*, reviewed, L, 144.
'Geopolitical Reality and the Disappearance of the Maritime Frontier in Qing Times,' by Jane Kate Leonard, XLVIII, 230-236.
George, schooner *(1755)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
George, David Lloyd, L, 186.
George Laws, ship *(1864)*, XLVII, 123.
George M. Stevens & Co., XLVII, 184 ff.
George Washington, ship *(1802)*, L, 245 ff.
George Washington, ship *(1917)*, XLVII, 203.
Germain, Lord George, XLVII, 6.
German Africa, German shipping line, XLVI, 108.
van Gerrevinck, Abram, XLVI, 174.
van Gerrevinck, Isaac, XLVI, 174.

van Gerrevinck, Lubertus, XLVI, 174.
Gerrish, Joseph, XLVIII, 26.
Gerry, Elbridge, XLVI, 141.
Gibaut, Commander John, XLVI, 10 ff.
Gilbert, Captain Frederick W., XLIX, 278.
Gilbert, Martin, *Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, 1939-1941*, reviewed, XLVII, 143.
Gilchrist, John H., "Latitude Errors and the New England Voyages of Pring and Waymouth," L, 5-17.
Gilkison, David and Robert, shipmasters, XLVIII, 77 ff.
Gilliam Henry, XLVII, 16.
Gilmer, Thomas, Secretary of the Navy, XLIX, 109.
Gim, Consul General Wever, XLVI, 27.
Gipsey, British ship *(1853)*, XLVII, 101.
Glasgow, HMS British frigate *(1776)*, XLVIII, 157.
Glasspoole, Richard, XLVIII, 240.
Gloire, French armored ship *(1863)*, XLIX, 117.
Godetia, HMS ship *(1942)*, L, 44.
Godfrey, Thomas, XLVI, 258.
Godine, schooner *(1787)*, XLIX, 88.
Golden Age, ship, *(1853)*, photo of, XLIX, 22, XLIX, 27.
Golden Gate, steamer *(1855)*, XLVIII, 113.
Goldowsky, Seebert J., *Yankee Surgeon: The Life and Times of Usher Parsons 1788-1868*, reviewed, L, 74.
Goldstein, Jonathan, 'Introduction to Fresh Perspectives on Qing Dynasty Maritime Relations,' XLVIII, 221-224.
Goodhue, Senator Benjamin, XLVI, 145; L, 270 ff.
Good Intent, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Gordon, Eleanora C., review by, L, 74.
Gorges, Sir Ferdinando, L, 16.
Gosnold, Bartholomew, L, 9.
Gough, Barry M., "Sea Power and South America: The 'Brazils' or South American Station of the Royal Navy 1808-1837," L, 26-34; reviews by, L, 150.
Gough, Captain Richard S., XLIX, 24.
Gould, Alicia B., *Nueva Lista Documentada de los Tribulantes de Colon en 1492*, reviewed, XLVI, 126.
Gould, Dr. Augustus A., XLIX, 34.
Grace, sloop *(1791)*, XLVI, 51.
Graf von Spee, Vice Admiral, L, 185.
Graham, William, XLVI, 168.
Grand Canal south of the Yangtze River, photo of, XLVIII, 233.
Grand Canary Coaling Company, XLVI, 105.
Grand Turk, ship (1780), XLVI, 9 ff.
Grand Turk II, ship *(1793)*, XLVI, 11 ff.
Grant, Charles, XLVI, 13.
Grant, Jr., Frederic D., 'The Failure of the Li-ch'uan Hong: Litigation as a Hazard of Nineteenth Century Foreign Trade,' XLVIII, 243-260.
Grant, Gen. Ulysses S., XLVIII, 105.
Graph of British Imports of Great Masts, 1764-1785, XLVI, 228.
Graph of latitude errors, L, 7, 8.
Gray, Ralph D., *The National Waterway: A History of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal*, 1769-1985, reviewed, L, 147.
Gray, Captain Robert, XLVII, 165; XLIX, 272 ff.
Great Eastern, British steamer *(1847)*, XLVIII, 114.
Great Northern, ship *(1914)*, XLVII, 202.
Great Northern Railway, XLVII, 193 ff.
Great Northern Steamship Company, XLVII, 193 ff.; sailing poster, XLVII, 204.
Great Republic, Pacific Mail steamer *(1866)*, XLVIII, 127.
Great Western, sidewheeler, *(1839)*, XLIX, 104.
Greek Trireme of the 5th Century B.C.: Discussion of a Projected Reconstruction, The, John Coates and Sean McGrail, editors, reviewed, XLVI, 121.
Green Captain John, XLVI, 8 ff.; XLVII, 31.
Greene, Griffin, L, 201 ff.; lithograph of, 202, photo of model steamboat machinery, 207.
Greenhill, Basil and John Hackman, *The Grain Races, the Baltic Background*, reviewed, XLVIII, 62.
Greenough, Thomas, XLVI, 258.
Gregory, Rear Adm. Francis H., XLVIII, 124.
Gregory, George F., artist, XLVII, 130.
Gregory, Samuel B., L, 90 ff.
Gretton, Peter, Royal Navy Commander, L, 219 ff.
Greyhound, British Ship (1606), XLVII, 777.
Gridley, destroyer *(1919)*, XLVII, 254.
"Grounding in the Bahamas in 1851, A," by Frank B. Evans III, XLIX, 123-125.
Grove, Eric J., *Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War Two*, reviewed, XLIX, 133.
Grover, David H., "The *Panay* Revisited: A Maritime Perspective, L, 000.
Gudin, Théodore, XLVI, 255.
Guerriere, HMS *(1812)*, XLVI, 162; XLVII, 15 ff.
Guillou, Surgeon Charles, XLIX, 154.
Guilmartin, John, XLVI, 84 ff.
Guttridge, Leonard F., *Icebound, The* Jeannette *Expedition's Quest for the North Pole*, reviewed, XLIX, 305.
Gutzlaff, Karl Friedrich, Prussian missionary, XLVIII, 278 ff.
Gywn, Julian, 'Shipbuilding for the Royal Navy in Colonial New England,' XLVIII, 22-30.

H. F. Alexander, ship (ex-*Great Northern*, ex-*Columbia*) *(1922)*, XLVII, 203.
H. L. Cook, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
H. L. Hunley, Confederate submarine *(1864)*, XLVII, 31; XLIX, 121.
H.M.A.S. *Shoalhaven*, British destroyer *(1949)*, XLIX, 209 ff.
H.M.S. *Amethyst*, frigate *(1949)*, XLIX, 209 ff.
H.M.S. *Consort*, British destroyer *(1949)*, XLIX, 208 ff.
H.M.S. *Devastation*, ocean-going ironclad (1873), XLIX, 117.
H.M.S. *London*, British cruiser *(1949)*, XLIX, 213.
H.M.S. *Nymphe*, British ship *(1903)*, XLIX, 282.
"H.M. Storeship *Porpoise*, 1780-83," by David Syrett, XLIX, 91-95.
H.M. *Victory*, warship *(1797)*, XLIX, 42.
Hackman, John and Basil Greenhill, *The Grain Races, the Baltic Background*, reviewed, XLVIII, 62.
Haayen, Aelbert, L, 284.
Hagger, William Guyse, XLVI, 258.
Hague, Robert L., XLVII, 46.
Hahn, Harold M., *Ships of the American Revolution*, reviewed, L, 229.
Hakluyt, Richard, L, 9.
Hakuno Maru, steamer (ex-*Contest*), *(1859)*, XLIX, 26.
Halifax, ship *(1756)*, XLIX, 266 ff.
Hall, Gordon, XLVIII, 273.
Hall, Michael G., review by, XLVIII, 64.
Hall, Phyllis A., 'The *Appam* and American Neutrality, XLVIII, 50-58.
Halley, Edmond, L, 288.
Halsey, James, XLVI, 258.
Halsey, Joseph, XLVI, 258.
Halsey, Thomas, XLVII, 164.
Ham, Jr., James, XLVI, 258.
Hamblin, William, 'The Fatimid Navy During the Early Crusades: 1099-1124,' XLVI, 77-83.
Hamilton, Paul, Secretary of the Navy, XLVII, 14.
Hamilton, Consul R. M., XLVI, 232.
Hampden, brig *(1776)*, XLVIII, 158.
Hampshire, ship *(1916)*, L, 129.
Hancock, frigate *(1777)*, XLVIII, 160, oil painting of, 161; XLIX, 41 ff.
Hancock, Jr., Robert G., "Pestilence From the Sea and American Quarantine Policy," L, 94-106.
Hancock's Wharf, Boston, L, 270.
Hankow, ship *(1860)*, XLIX, 22.
Happy Return, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.

Harbottle, John, XLVI, 47.
Harbottle, Winshipa, XLVI, 47.
Harbron, John D., *Trafalgar and the Spanish Navy, reviewed, XLIX, 314.*
Hare, Charles Willing, XLVIII, 247 ff.
Harland, John, Mark Myers, Seamanship in the Age of Sail, reviewed, XLVIII, 187.
Harlequin, ship *(1756),* XLVIII, 38.
Harmless, British ship *(1776),* XLVIII, 18.
Harriet Lane, Confed. cutter, *(1863),* XLVIII, 92.
Harrison, Captain, XLVIII, 50 ff.
Hart, Jane S. (Mrs. Parker T.), review by, 141.
Hart, William, XLVI, 258.
Hartley, Condon & Company, 104.
Haslach, Robert D., and Donald G. Shomette, *Raid on America: The Dutch Naval Campaign* of 1672-1674, reviewed, L, 228.
Hatch, Sr., Francis W., XLVI, 61.
Hatcher, Captain Michael, XLVII, 275.
Hatfield, USS destroyer *(1921),* XLVI, 244 ff.
Hattendorf, John B., and B. Mitchell Sampson III, and John R. Wadleigh, *Sailors and Scholars, The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College,* reviewed, XLVIII, 186.
Hattie H. Barbour, schooner *(1883),* XLIX, 29.
Hattie L.M., Canadian schooner *(1902),* XLIX, 280.
Have at All, privateer *(1926),* XLIX, 253.
Havelock, HMS ship *(1942),* L, 44.
Haviland, E. Kenneth, review by, XLVII, 59-62; review by, XLVIII, 132, 193, 205.
Haviland, Edward Kenneth, "American Steam Navigation in China, 1845-1878," XLIX, 21-28.
Hakwe, Admiral Sir Edward, XLVIII, 28.
Hawkins, Vice Admiral John, XLIX, 5.
Haws, Duncan and Alex A. Hurst, *The Maritime History of the World,* reviewed, XLVII, 283.
Hawthorne, Nathaniel, XLVII, 169.
Hayes, Adam, XLVI, 224.
Healey, Captain Frank, XLIX, 32.
Hearne, Samuel, L, 35.
Heian Maru, steamer (ex-*Scotland*) *(1865),* XLIX, 22.
Helm, Thomas, XLVI, 214.
Hemingway, Ernest, XLVI, 188.
Henderson, Richard, commentator, *53 Boats You Can Build,* reviewed, XLVI, 130.
Henley, Commodore John D., XLVII, 27.
Henry Dodge, revenue cutter, *(1861),* XLVIII, 87 ff.
Henry, Commander H., XLVI, 238.
Henry, Joseph, XLVII, 176 ff.
Herald, American merchant vessel *(1843),* XLVI, 232.
Herald, ship *(1798),* XLVI, 161.
Herbert, John R., reviews by, XLVI, 126; XLVIII, 205; XLIX, 134, 232, 306.
Hercules, ship *(1627),* XLIX, 254.
Heren Zeventien, or Gentlemen Seventeen, Dutch East India Company, XLVII, 241 ff.
Herman Melville's Picture Gallery, by Stuart M. Frank, reviewed, XLIX, 60.
Herman steamship (1845), XLVIII, 114.
Herreshoff, L. Francis, *Captain Nat Herreshoff,* reviewed, XLVIII, 186.
Hertigennan Af Sodermanland, Swedish ship, *(1780),* XLIX, 91 ff.
Heyrman, Christine Leigh, *Commerce and Culture.* The Maritime Communities of Colonial Massachusetts 1690-1750, reviewed, XLVI, 128.
Hezekiah Williams, timber drogher *(1849),* XLVIII, 100.
Hickman, Dr. Money L., XLVI, 64.
Highflyer, HM tender *(1813),* XLVI, 167.
Hildreth, Captain Richard, XLVI, 51.
Hill, James Jerome, XLVII, 193 ff.
Hippisley, Sir John, XLIX, 251.
Hiram, ship *(1812),* XLVI, 166; L, 104 ff.
Hiram Fogg & Company, XLIX, 26.
Hiryu Maru, steamer (ex-*Promise*), *(1863),* XLIX, 27.
"History of Fluvial Navigation: The Example of the Meuse, A," by Marc Suttor, L, 165-177.
Hodgkins, Timothy, XLVI, 217.
Hof van Breda, Dutch East India vessel, *(1675),* XLVI, 106.
Hoffman, Anne and E. Jeffrey Stann, edited by, *Voyage to the Southern Ocean: The Letters of Lieutenant William Reynolds from the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842,* reviewed, L, 150.
Hofsommer, Don L, 'The Maritime Enterprises of James J. Hill,' XLVII, 193-205.
Hogarth, Donald D. "The *Emanuel* of Bridgwater and Discovery of Martin Frobisher's 'Black Ore' in Ireland, XLIX, 14-20.
Holburne, Admiral Francis, XLVIII, 29.
Holcomb, Sherman, XLVII, 128.
Holdfast, pinnace, *(1628),* XLIX, 255.
Holker, Jr. John, XLVI, 29.
Holland John P., XLVIII, 127.
Hollins, Commodore George N., XLVIII, 90.
Holly, David C., *Steamboat on the Chesapeake Emma Giles and the Tolchester Line,* reviewed, XLVIII, 209.
Holman, Francis, oil paintings by, XLVIII, 161.
Holyoke, Dr. Edward A., XLIX, 36.
Home Ports of Protected British Vessels, Table II, XLVIII, 8.
Hondius, Jodocus, L, 284.
Hongkong, Canton & Macao Steamboat Co., XLIX, 24 ff.
Hongsheng, Professor Cai, XLVI, 26 ff.
Hood III, Ronald Chalmers, *Royal Republicans, the French Naval Dynasties Between the World Wars,* reviewed, XLVIII, 131.
Hooper, Edwin Bickford, *United States Naval Power in a Changing World,* reviewed, L, 150.
Hopewell, British ship *(1776),* XLVIII, 16.
Hopkins, Commander Esek, XLVIII, 157.
Hopkins, USS cruiser *(1921),* XLVI, 243 ff.
Horner, Frank, *The French Reconnaissance. Baudin in Australia 1801-1803,* reviewed, L, 70.
Hornet, frigate *(1821),* XLVII, 28; L, 60.
Housatonic, steam-sloop *(1864),* XLVII, 31; XLIX, 121.
House of Conseequa, Chinese Merchant, photo of, XLVIII, 235.
Howard, Lord Admiral Charles, XLIX, 5.
Howell, George, XLVIII, 252.
Howes, Captain Frederic, XLVII, 133.
Howes' Patent Topsail Rig, illus. of, XLVII, 134.
Howland and Aspinwall, XLVII, 43.
Hruby, Dr. Thomas, mention, XLIX, 38.
Hsu Chi-yu, Chinese Governor, XLVI, 41.
Huasteca Petroleum Company, XLVII, 47.
Hubble, Samuel, XLIX, 88.
Hudgins, Captain Robert K., XLVIII, 87.
Hughes, Lcdr. James J., L, 260 ff.
Hull, Lieutenant Isaac, XLVI, 162; XLVII, 14 ff.
Humboldt, steam pack *(1840),* XLVIII, 114.
Hummel, Jr., Arthur W., XLVI, 26.
Humphreys, David, XLVI, 218.
Humphreys, Joshua, XLIX, 46.
Humphreys, R. A., L, 26.
Hunt, Harvey W., XLVI, 262.
Hunter, Alvah F., *A Year on a Monitor and the Destruction of Fort Sumter,* reviewed, XLIX, 311.
Hunter, Ens. James, XLVIII, 102.
Hunter, William C., XLVI, 36.
Hunter, Commander William W., XLVIII, 92.
Hurault, schooner *(1755),* XLIX, 264 ff.
Hurst, Alex A. and Duncan Haws, *The Maritime History of the World,* reviewed, XLVII, 283.

Hutchinson, Captain Daniel H., XLVII, 121.
Huquang, steamer *(1862)*, XLIX, 23.
Huy, 1612, photo of, L, 175.
Huzzar, British frigate *(1812)*, XLVI, 169.
Hyde Windlass Company of Bath, XLVII, 132.
Hydra, ship *(1785)*, XLVI, 9 ff.
Hyperion, bark *(1794)*, L, 103.

Icebound, The Jeannette *Expedition's Quest for the North Pole*, by Leonard F. Guttridge, reviewed, XLIX, 305.
Iceland, ship *(1877)*, XLVI, 63.
Ida, ship *(1817)*, XLVI, 44.
Ida M. Clark, Canadian Schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Illustration of schooners from Falconer's dictionary, XLIX, 199 ff.
Illustration of steam engines of *Tennessee* and *Cherokee*, XLVII, 38.
Independence, US ship *(1820)*, XLVI, 218; XLIX, 42.
Industrious Union, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
Industry, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Industry, sloop *(1787)*, XLIX, 88.
Ingall, Elisabeth, mention, XLIX, 226 ff.
Ingeneiro, armed tug, *(1909)*, XLIX, 284.
Ingersoll, Charles Jared, XLVIII, 249.
Ingersoll, Captain Jonathan, XLVI, 9 ff.
Inkster, Tom. H., "Voyage to Canada's Arctic Islands," L, 35-41; "Orkney Marine Disasters Changed the Course of History," L, 127-131.
"Inquiry into H. I. Chapelle's Research in Naval History, An," by W. M. P. Dunne, XLIX, 39-55.
Insurgent, French frigate *(1800)*, L, 245 ff.
International lifeboat racing team illustration of, XLVII, 51.
International Register of Historic Ships, by Norman J. Brouwer, reviewed, XLVII, 216.
'Introduction to *Fresh Perspectives on Qing Dynasty Maritime Relations*,' by Jonathan Goldstein, XLVIII, 221-224.
Invincible, British battleship, *(1873)*, L, 33.
Ireland, John De Courcy, *Ireland's Sea Fisheries: A History*, reviewed, XLIX, 310.
Iron Ship: The Story of Brunel's SS Great Britain, The, by Ewan Corlett, reviewed, L, 230.
Iron Steamboat Company, XLVII, 34.
Iron Witch, side-wheeler (1846), XLVIII, 118.
'Isaac Hull's Victory Revisited,' by Tyrone G. Martin, XLVII, 14-21.
Isaacson, Anthony, L, 21.
Isabel May, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Isherwood, Benjamin Franklin, XLVIII, 119; XLIX, 117.
Island Queen, steamer *(1863)*, XLVIII, 101.
Isle of Orleans, illustration of, XLVIII, 80.
Ivanhoe, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
Ivy, Confed. ship *(1861)*, XLVIII, 90.

J. L. Dimmock, ship *(1854)*, XLVII, 104.
'Jack London in the Tradition of American Sea Fiction,' by Bert Bender, XLVI, 188-199.
Jackman, S. W., reviews by, XLVII, 55; XLVIII, 131, 186, 197, 201.
Jackson, Edward, XLVI, 47.
Jackson, Melvin H., "The Philadelphia Steamboat of 1796," supplemented, edited and illustrated by Paul Forsythe Johnston, L, 201-218.
Jackson, Susan, XLVI, 47.
Jamaica, HMS cruiser *(1949)*, L, 291 ff.
James, schooner *(1800)*, XLIX, 274.
James O'Donahue, schooner *(1883)*, XLIX, 31 ff.
James Watt, steamer (1820), XLVIII, 77.
Jamieson, A. J., editor, *A People of the Sea, The Maritime History of the Channel Islands*, reviewed, XLVII, 196.
Jansen, Marin Henry, XLVIII, 45 ff.
Jansz, Willem, L, 288.
Janzen, Olaf Uwe, 'The American Threat to the Newfoundland Fisheries, 1776-1777, XLVIII, 154-164.
Japan, paddle steamer *(1866)*, XLIX, 26.
Japonica, bark *(1851)*, XLIX, 123.
Jardine, Matheson & Company, XLIX, 25.
Jardine Matheson Archive, Cambridge, England, XLVIII, 254.
Java, HMS frigate *(1812)*, XLVII, 16.
Jeannette, ship *(1879)*, XLIX, 305.
Jed, HMS frigate *(1943)*, L, 220 ff.
Jeffreys & Darcy, XLVII, 93.
Jenkins, Lt. Thornton A., XLVII, 175.
Jenny, sloop *(1748)*, XLVIII, 34.
Jersey Standard, XLVII, 45.
John Adams, frigate (1799), XLVI, 151 ff., 232; XLVII, 22 ff., painting of vessel, 23; XLIX, 41 ff.; L, 245 ff.
John & Adam, ship *(1813)*, XLVI, 165.
John D. Archbold, ship *(1913)*, XLVII, 45.
John & Fortune, ship *(1627)*, XLIX, 254.
John Jay, ship *(1794)*, XLVI, 11 ff.
John Paul Jones and the Battle of Flamborough Head: A Reconsideration, by Thomas J. Schaeper, reviewed, L, 143.
John Randolph, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
John A. Ross, whaleship *(1877)*, L, 123.
Johnson, Captain B. R., XLIX, 26.
Johnston, Paul Forsythe, *Ship and Boat Models in Ancient Greece*, reviewed, XLVI, 120; review by, 121; XLVII, review by, 283; L, review by, 65; *Proceedings of the Sixteenth Conference on Underwater Archaeology*, edited, reviewed, XLVIII, 200, review by, 63; *"The Philadelphia Steamboat of 1796,"* by Melvin H. Jackson, supplemented, edited and illustrated by, L, 201-218.
Johnston, Robert, XLVI, 30.
Jolinck, Heyndrick, L, 284.
Jones, Alfred, XLVI, 105.
Jones, Captain John, XLVIII, 35.
Jones, John C., XLVI, 46.
Jones, John Paul, XLVIII, 156.
Jones, Captain Thomas ap Catesby, XLVI, 45.
Jones, W. & S., XLVI, 261.
Jones, William, Secretary of the Navy, XLVI, 158; XLVII, 20.
Joppien, Rudiger, Andrew David and Bernard Smith, *The Charts and Coastal Views of Captain Cook's Voyages. The Voyage of the* Endeavor, *1768-1771, Hakluyt Society Extra Series No. 43*, reviewed, XLIX, 318.
Jörg, Christiaan J. A., XLVII, 275.
Jorgensen, Captain A. B., L, 260 ff.
Joseph Howe, ship *(1860)*, XLVII, 104.
Josselyn, John, XLVI, 213.
Journal of a Voyage with Bering, 1741-1742, by Georg W. Steller, reviewed, L, 141.
Junsoku Maru, steamer (ex-*Meteor*), *(1858)*, XLIX, 26.

Kaimon Maru, steamer (ex-*Viola*), *(1864)*, XLIX, 25.
Kamtschatka, Russian frigate *(1840)*, XLVIII, 110.
Kang, Colonel, L, 291 ff.
Kankakee, steamer *(1869)*, XLIX, 25.
Katherine May, brig (1919), XLIX, 31.
Kearney, General Stephen W., XLIX, 112.
Kearsarge, bark —rigged screw sloop— of war, *(1864)*, XLVII, 118; XLIX, 117.
Keigaka Maru, steamer (ex-*China*), *(1862)*, XLIX, 26.
Kemble, John Haskell, reviews by, XLVI, 123; XLVII, 217; XLVIII, 131; XLIX, 63; L, 151, 152.
Kendrick, Captain, XLVIII, 246.
Kendrick, John, XLVI, 51.
Kennithorpe, George, XLVII, 77.
Kent, Chancellor, XLVIII, 255.
Kent, First Lieutenant Bartholomew, XLVII, 16.

Keokuk, armored vessel *(1861)*, XLVIII, 120.
Kerans, Lt. Commander John Simon, L, 291 ff.
Kewanee, steamer *(1869)*, XLIX, 25.
Kiang Ling Liberation, L, 291 ff.
Kiangse, steamer *(1862)*, XLIX, 23.
Kiangteen, steamer (ex-*Moning*), *(1869)*, XLIX, 23.
King, Benjamin, XLVI, 258.
King, Mary, L, 000.
King, Pauline N., 'Stephen Reynolds' Influence on Business and Culture in Hawaii, 1823-1855,', XLVI, 43-49.
King, Captain Phillip Parker, British Admiralty, L, 32.
Kinsatsu, steamer *(1871)*, XLIX, 23.
Kitagawa Utamaro, wood block print, XLVI, 54.
Kitchener, HMCS corvette *(1943)*, L, 210 ff.
Kitchener Memorial, photo of, L, 130.
Kitching, John B., XLVIII, 118.
Knappenhof, Dutch ship, *(1731)*, XLVII, 245.
Knerr, Douglas, "Through the 'Golden Mist': A Brief Overview of Armada Historiography," 5-13.
Knight, R. J. B. Knight, 'New England Forests and British Seapower: Albion Revised,' XLVI, 221-229.
Knight, Russell W., review by, XLVI, 120.
Knowles, Admiral Charles, XLVIII, 25.
Knox, Henry, Secretary of War, XLIX, 47.
Knox, Major General Henry, XLVI, 29.
Knox, Midshipman Samuel R., XLIX, 153.
Kofuyo, steamer (ex-*Chusan*), *(1866)*, XLIX, 26.
Kortright, Lawrence, XLVIII, 38.
Kronprinz Wilhelm, German raider (1917), XLVIII, 53.
Krueger, Hilmar C., "Genoese Shipowners and Their Ships in the Twelfth Century," XLVII, 229-239.
Krueger, Hilmar C., *Navi e proprietá navale a Genove, seconda metá del sec.* XII, reviewed, XLVII, 216.
Kumsing, steamer *(1862)*, XLIX, 25.
Kundhardt, C. P. *Small Yachts, Their Design and Construction*, reviewed, XLIX, 232.
Kverndal, Ronald, *Seamen's Missions: Their Origin and Early Growth*, reviewed, XLIX, 309.
Kyorin Maru, steamer *(1861)*, XLIX, 23.

Laas, Virginia Jeans and Dudley Taylor Cornish, *Lincoln's Lee; The Life of Samuel Phillips Lee, United States Navy, 1812-1897*, reviewed, XLVIII, 192.
Labaree, Benjamin B., *A Supplement (1971-1986) to Robert G. Albion's Naval and Maritime History, An Annotated Bibliography*, reviewed, XLIX, 136.
Laconia, Cunard liner *(1917)*, XLVIII, 57.
Laconic, bark *(1851)*, XLVII, 99.
La Croyable, French privateer *(1798)*, L, 245 ff.
Lady Sherbrooke, steamer *(1823)*, XLVIII, 80 ff.
Lady Washington, ship *(1791)*, XLVI, 51.
La Follette, Sen. Robert M., L, 59.
Lago Shipping Company, Ltd., XLVII, 47.
La Grande époque de la Marine á voile, by Martin Acerra and Jean Meyer, reviewed, XLVIII, 207.
Lai Sung, Chinese artist, XLVII, 130.
Lamar, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
La Marquise de Vaudreuil, French ship, *(1756)*, XLIX, 266 ff.
Lamb, Anthony, XLVI, 258.
Lamb, Ursula, review by, XLVII, 64.
Lambert, Andrew, *Battleships in Transition: The Creation of the Steam Battlefleet 1815-1860*, reviewed, XLVI, 129.
Lambert, Andrew, *Warrior, The World's First Ironclad Then and Now*, reviewed, XLIX, 134.
Lanchester, F. W., XLVI, 185.
Langley, Harold D., review by, XLIX, 313.
Langley, USS aircraft carrier *(1921)*, XLVI, 250; L, 53.
Lansing, Robert, Sec. of State, XLVIII, 55.
Laprarie, steamer *(1823)*, XLVIII, 80 ff.
La Republicaine, French frigate *(1798)*, XLIX, 272.
Larson, Captain Adolv, XLVII, 51.
L'Astrolabe, French corvette *(1838)*, 154, photo of model, XLIX, 163.
"Latitute Errors and the New England Voyages of Pring and Waymouth," by John H. Gilchrist, L, 5-17.
Latooka, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Latrobe, Benjamin Henry, L, 209.
'Launching Prosperity Samuel Townsend and the Maritime Trade of Colonial Long Island, 1747-1773,' by Geoffrey L. Rossano, XLVIII, 31-43.
Laura, schooner *(1817)*, XLVI, 217.
Lavery, Brian, *Deane's Doctrine of Naval Architecture 1670*, reviewed XLVIII, 198; *The Arming and Fitting of English Ships of War, 1600-1815*, reviewed, XLIX, 306; *Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815*, reviewed, L, 148.
Lavinia, HMS frigate *(1812)*, XLVI, 169.
Lawrence, Captain Effingham, XLVIII, 37.
Leadbetter, Charles, L, 288.
Leaf Upon the Sea; A Small Ship in the Mediterranean, 1941-1943, A, by Gordon W. Stead, reviewed, L, 140.
Le Berceau, French corvette *(1800)*, XLVI, 151.
LeBreton, Louis, lithograph from drawing by, XLIX, 155-56.
Le Decade, French privateer *(1800)*, XLVII, 26.
Ledyard, John, XLVI, 28.
Lee, Francis D., XLIX, 121.
Lee, Joseph, XLVI, 214.
"Legacy of a Saxon King: Royal Prints of Whale Strandings in the Peabody Museum," by Klaus Barthelmess, XLIX, 226-229.
Lehigh, monitor *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Leiner, Frederick C., "The Subscription of Warships of 1798,' XLVI, 141-158; reviews by, XLIX, 240; L, 145.
Le Jason French privateer *(1800)*, XLVII, 26.
Le Museé imaginaire de la marine antique, by Lucien Basch, reviewed, L, 63.
Lenthall, John, XLIX, 117.
Leo, Sam, L, 291 ff.
Leonard, Jane Kate, 'Geopolitical Reality and the Disappearance of the Maritime Frontier in Qing Times,' XLVIII, 230-236.
Leopard, survey boat, photo of model, XLIX, 162.
Leopard, British gun-ship *(1807)*, L, 245 ff.
Le Plongeur, French submarine *(1863)*, XLIX, 122.
Leslie L., Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Leuth, 1561, photo of, L, 174.
Levant Company, XLVIII, 24.
Lewinson, Victor A., 'Sam Crocker, Boat Designer,' XLVIII, 182-185.
Lewinson, Victor A., "Duhamel du Monceau: *Savant* and Naval Architect," L, 132-137.
Lewis, Archibald R., and Timothy J. Runyan, *European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500*, XLVI, reviewed, 200; "Byzantine and Moselm Shipping in the Mediterranean, 500-1250," XLVII, 157-160; review by, 216; XLVIII, reviews by 61, 206, 207, 210; "The Maritime Mediterranean, 500-1571 A.D.," XLIX, review article, 126-132; *Nomads and Crusaders A.D. 1000-1368*, XLIX, reviewed, 310; reviews by, 136, 235, 318, 320; Lewis Archibald R., *The Eastern Yacht Club. A History from 1870-1985*, review by, L, 66. Editors comments, XLVI, XLVII, XLVIII, XLIX.
Lewis Cass, Confed. cutter (1855), XLVIII, 90.
Lexington, USS warship (1830), XLVI, 230; L, 31.
Liberty, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Liége, photos of, L, 170, 173.
Lifeline of the Confederacy [:] Blockade Running During the Civil War, by Stephen R. Wise, reviewed, L, 67.
Light Horse, ship (1784), XLVI, 10 ff.
Limerick Lass, bark *(1883)*, XLIX, 31 ff.

Lincoln's Lee; The Life of Samuel Phillips United States Navy 1812-1897, by Dudley Taylor Cornish and Virginia Jeans Laas, reviewed, XLVIII, 192.
Lindsay, Lady Mary, XLVI, 19.
Lindsay, W. S., XLVI, 104.
L'Insurgente, French ship *(1812)*, XLVI, 114.
Lintin, steamer (ex-*Rose*), *(1866)*, XLIX, 25.
Lin-Tse-hsū, Imperial Commissioner, XLVI, 37.
Lion, Spanish steamship *(1838)*, XLVIII, 112.
Littlefield, Roger Sherman, XLVI, 48.
Little Frank, brigantine (1802), XLIX, 86.
Liverpool, British ship *(1743)*, XLVIII, 23.
Livingston, Robert G., XLVIII, 40; L, 202.
Livingston, Walter, XLVI, 29.
Lloyd Triestino, Italian shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Lloyd, William, XLVIII, 33.
Lochinvar, ship *(1835)*, XLVII, 90 ff.
Locke, Parson Mason, XLVI, 28.
Lodebar, brig *(1861)*, XLVIII, 93.
Lodge, Senator Henry Cabot, L, 55.
Log of Christopher Columbus, The, by Robert H. Fuson, reviewed, XLVIII, 61.
London, brig *(1756)*, XLIX, 266 ff.
London, British ship *(1949)*, L, 291 ff.
London, Jack, XLVI, 188 ff.; photo of, XLVI, 194, 198.
Long, David F., '"Mad Jack" Percival in Vietnam: First American Hostilities, May 1845,' XLVII, 169-173.
Longford, Elizabeth, XLVI, 23.
Loosestrife, HMS corvette *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Lord Clive of India, XLVI, 29.
Lord Elgin, bark *(1840)*, XLVII, 93.
Lorenzo Sabine, XLVIII, 165 ff.
'Lorenzo Sabine's History of the Fisheries,' by William L. Welch, XLVIII, 165-172.
Loring, Augustus P., and Edwin B. Newman, 'Some Notes on the Paper of the *Atlantic Neptune*,' XLVI, 173-178.
Lothrop, Francis B., mention, XLIX, 226 ff.
Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration, by James Pritchard, reviewed, XLVIII, 195.
Louise, transport *(1755)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
'L'Ouverture, General Pierre Francois Domingue Toussaint, XLVI, 159.
Lucien Basch, *Le Museé imaginarie de la marine antique*, reviewed, L, 63.
Ludlow, Charles, XLVII, 27.
Ludwig, J. M., XLVI, 93.
Lugard, Lord, XLVI, 105.
Lundeberg, Philip K., and Dana M. Wegner, "Not for Conquest But Discovery" Rediscovering the Ships of the Wilkes Expedition, XLIX, 151-167.
Lundeberg, Philip K., review by, XLVII, 211.
Lundin, United States Consul John E., 26.
Lusitania, British passenger liner, *(1917)*, XLVIII, 56.
Lydia, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Ly-ee-moon, screw propulsion *(1874)*, XLIX, 23.
Lyford, Col. Stephen C., XLVII, 180 ff.
Lynch, Jr., James B., "Edmund Custis and His 'Wreck-Fishing' Invention," L, 18-25.
Lynch, William F., explorer, XLVII, 29.
Lyon, Captain Thomas, XLVII, 37.

Macartney, Lord, XLVI, 8 ff.
Macedonian, HMS *(1812)*, XLVII, 12.
Macedonian, frigate *(1829)*, XLIX, 41.
Macedonian, sloop-of-war *(1862)*, XLVII, 31.
MacGregor, David R., *Merchant Sailing Ships 1815-1850, Supremacy of Sail*, reviewed, XLVI, 124; *Schooners in Four Centuries*, reviewed, XLVI, 201.
MacGregor, David R., *Fast Sailing Ships, Their Design and Construction, 1775-1875*, reviewed, XLIX, 315.
Mackenzie, Alexander Slidell, L, 245 ff.
MacLeod, D. Peter, "The French Siege of Oswego in 1756: Inland Naval Warfare in North America," XLIX, 262-271.
Macy, Captain Alexander, L, 213.
Madden, Vice Admiral, XLIX, 208.
Madison, President James, XLVII, 27.
Mahan, Admiral Thayer, XLVIII, 10.
Maine, ship *(1853)*, XLVII, 101.
'Maine Transatlantic Salt Trade in the Nineteenth Century, The,' by Wayne M. O'Leary, XLVII, 83- 107.
Malabar, ship (1856), XLVI, 183.
Mallory, Charles Henry, XLVIII, 118.
Mallory, Senator Stephen, Confederate Sec. of the Navy, XLVIII, 99; XLIX, 106; L, 108.
Malloy, Mary, *'Storm Along: An American Sea Anthology,'* A Manuscript by Joanna Carver Colcord in the Collection of the Peabody Museum of Salem, XLVI, 111-119.
Maloney, Linda M., *The Captain from Connecticut: The Life and Naval Times of Isaac Hull*, reviewed, XLIX, 238.
Manassas, turtleback ram *(1861)*, XLIX, 119.
Manassas, (ex-*Minot*) schooner *(1861)*, *XLVIII, 95.*
Mancall, Mark, XLVIII, 261.
Mandarin, ship *(1813)*, XLVI, 170.
Mandarin, steamer *(1863)*, XLIX, 25.
Manley, Captain John, XLVIII, 162.
Manning, Thomas G., *U.S. Coast Survey vs. Naval Hydrographic Office. A 19th Century Rivalry in Science and Politics*, reviewed, XLIX, 317.
Manuel de Rosas, General Juan, L, 31.
Map of Arabian Sea, XLVIII, 150.
Map of border and southern states, L, 90.
Map of China Coastline, L, 181.
Map of the English Channel-Battles of the Hundred Years' War, XLVI, 93.
Map of first Genoese-Venetian War, XLVI, 87.
Map of Grand Chanal-China, 1793, XLVIII, 231.
Map of Port of Mahon, L, 135.
Map of trade routes, ca. 1250, XLVI, 86.
Map of the coast of Western Sahara, L, 120.
Marcil, Eileen Reid, 'Ship-Rigged Rafts and the Export of Quebec Timber,' XLVIII, 77-86.
Marcus, Captain Fred, XLVII, 49.
Margaret, Salem ship *(1801)*, XLVI, 53.
Margery, transport *(1781)*, XLVII, 11.
Mariana, ship *(1799)*, XLVII, 164 ff.
Marion, sloop-of-war *(1862)*, XLVII, 31.
Mariposa, steamer (1905), XLVI, 198.
Maritime Belge, Belgian shipping line, XLVI, 108.
'Maritime Enterprises of James J. Hill, The,' by Don L. Hofsommer, XLVII, 193-205.
Maritime History of the World, The, by Duncan Haws and Alex A. Hurst, reviewed, XLVII, 283.
"Maritime Mediterranean, 500-1571 A.D., The" review article by Archibald R. Lewis, XLIX, 126-132.
'Maritime Studies at Sea Semester,' by James Millinger, XLVII, 206-210.
Markland, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Marmora, propeller-driven vessel *(1844)*, XLVIII, 117.
Marquis of Ely, cutter *(1809)*, XLVIII, 240.
Mars, steamer (ex-*Indore*), *(1862)*, XLIX, 25.
Marshall, Jim, L, 260 ff.
Marshall, Chief Justice John, L, 100.
Marsilly Carriage, illustration, XLVII, 115.
Marten, Sir Henry, XLIX, 253.
Martin, Tyrone G., "Isaac Hull's Victory Revisited,' XLVII, 14-21, mention of, XLVII 173.

Martin, Tyrone G., 'Underway Replenishment, 1799-1800,' XLVI, 159-164.
Martin, Wallace E., *Sail & Steam on the Northern California Coast, 1850-1900*, reviewed, XLVII, 217.
Martin White, steamer *(1866)*, XLIX, 26.
Mary, sloop (1752), XLVIII, 36.
Mary, armed merchant ship *(1799)*, L, 270 ff.
Maryland, frigate (1799), 151 ff.; XLVI, 151 ff.; XLIX, 45 ff.
Mary Sorley, ex-*Henry Dodge*, revenue cutter (1863), XLVIII, 92.
Mason, Senator James, L, 113.
Massachusetts, ship *(1800)*, XLVI, 53.
Massachusetts II, revenue cutter *(1794)*, XLIX, 47.
Mast and sail plan of a schooner, XLIX, 204.
Masterson, Daniel M., *Naval History: The Sixth Symposium of the U.S. Naval Academy* reviewed, XLIX, 313.
Matanzas, screw-propeller (1859), XLVIII, 118.
Matheson, Captain John, L, 39.
'Matthew Fontaine Maury and the Introduction of Oceanography to the Netherlands in the Second Half of the Nineteenth Century,' by William F. J. Mörzer Bruyns, XLVIII, 44-49.
Mauhiessen, Peter, XLVI, 188.
Maud Snare, schooner *(1883)*, XLIX, 30.
Maury, Matthew Fontaine, XLVIII, 44 ff.; XLIX, 120.
Mayer, Dr. Alfred G., mention, XLIX, 37.
Mayflower, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
McCartney, Lord, XLVIII, 237.
McCormick, Cyrus, XLVIII, 129.
McGowan, RADM Samuel, L, 59.
McGrail, Sean and John Coates, editors, *The Greek Trireme of the 5th Century B.C.: Discussion of a Projected Reconstruction*, reviewed, XLVI, 121.
McKay, John *The Armed Transport* Bounty, reviewed, L, 72.
McKinney, Sam, *Reach of Tide, Ring of History; A Columbia River Voyage*, reviewed, L, 149.
McNeil, Jim, *Charleston's Navy Yard: a picture history*, reviewed, XLVIII, 206.
McNeill, Captain Hector, XLVIII, 162.
McVay, Jr., Admiral Charles, L, 260 ff.
Medieval Expansion of Europe, The, by J. R. S. Phillips, reviewed, XLIX, 233.
Medows, Sir William, XLVI, 20.
Mei An, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Foo, flagship *(1912)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Hing, merchant ship *(1938)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Hsia, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Hung, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Meijenburg, Dutch ship (1713), XLVII, 248.
Mei Ping, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Tan, merchant vessel, *(1929)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Yi, motor tanker, *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Ying, motor tanker *(1927)*, L, 260 ff.
Mei Yung, merchant ship *(1938)*, L, 260 ff.
Melbourne, William T., XLVI, 218.
Mender, Peter G. A., L, 260 ff.
Mentor, ship *(1800)*, XLVII, 165.
Merchant, commercial iron ship (1861), XLVIII, 125.
Merchant's Perspective: Captain Jacobus Boelen's Narrative of his Visit to Hawai'i in 1828, A, by Jacobus Boelen, reviewed, XLIX, 135.
Merchant Sailings Ships 1815-1850, Supremacy of Sail, by David R. MacGregor, reviewed, XLVI, 124.
Mercury, ship *(1809)*, XLVIII, 240.
Merrimack, screw frigate *(1862)*, XLVI, 151; XLVIII, 125; XLIX, 114 ff.
Meshouda, Tripolitan cruiser, former American ship *Betsey* of Boston, (1802), XLVII, 26.
Meshuda, Tripolitanian gunboat, *(1803)*, XLVI, 156.
Messenger, ship (1894), XLVII, 127.
Metamora, steamer *(1849)*, XLVII, 42.
Meteor, steamer *(1850)*, XLIX, 24.
Metropolis, paddle-wheeler (1854), XLVIII, 114.
Meuse River, L, 165 ff.
Meyer, Jean and Martin Acerra, *La Grande époque de la Marina á voile*, review by, XLVIII, 207.
Miantonomoh, monitor *(1863)*, XLVIII, 125; XLIX, 116.
Michigan, US warship (1843), 96 ff. photos of, XLVII, 97, 98.
Midas, twin-screw vessel *(1844)*, XLVIII, 117.
Middleton, Charles, XLVI, 224.
Miller, George L., "The Second Destruction of the *Geldermalsen*," XLVII, 275-281.
Miller, Stuart Creighton, XLVIII, 271.
Milliken, Captain John F., XLVII, 51.
Milliken, Captain Joseph, XLVIII, 33.
Millinger, James, 'Maritime Studies at Sea Semester,' XLVII, 206-210.
Milne, William, XLVIII, 275.
Minchinton, Walter E., 'The Canaries as Ports of Call,' XLVI, 100-110.
Mindoro, clipper ship *(1877)*, XLVI, 63, XLVII, 120.
Minister Wedel, tanker *(1942)*, L, 46.
Minnesota, ship (1903), XLVII, 199.
Minot, lighthouse tender *(1861)*, XLVIII, 87.
Minto, Captain Thomas and Eric Stevens, *The Search for the Kobenhaven*, reviewed, XLVII, 143.
Mispelkamp, Peter K. H., review by, L, 148, 231.
Mississippi, frigate *(1839)*, XLIX, 100; *(1853)* XLVI, 58; *(1920)*, L, 54.
Missouri, Confed. ironclad *(1863)*, XLVIII, 92.
Missouri, side-wheel frigate *(1839)*, XLIX, 100.
Mitchell, Edward and Randall R. Reeves, "Right Whales, Not Humpbacks, Taken in Cintra Bay," L, 119-126.
Mitchell, Samuel L., XLVII, 36.
Mitchell, Walter, XLVI, 112.
Mitchell, Brig. Gen. William, L, 52 ff.; photo of, 57.
Mitter, Radha, Kissen, Calcutta, picture of between, XLVI, 15-16.
'Moby-Dick: The Two 'Missing' Prints by 'H. Durand,' by Stuart M. Frank, XLVI, 252-257.
Model of lighthouse tower, illustration of, XLVII, 188.
Model for steamboat by Desblancs, 1802, photo of, L, 205.
Moffett, Rear Adm. William Adger, L, photo of, 53.
Mohawk, ship *(1756)*, XLIX, 266 ff.
Monadnock, monitor *(1866)*, XLIX, 116.
'Monitor Companies: A Study of the Major Firms That Built the USS *Monitor*,' by William N. Still, XLVIII, 106-130.
Monitor, ironclad *(1861)*, XLVIII, 106 ff.; XLIX, 114 ff.
Monson, ship *(1813)*, XLVI, 166.
Montauk, armored vessel *(1862)*, XLVIII, 122.
Moore, James, and James Dodds, *Building the Wooden Fighting Ship*, reviewed, XLVI, 202.
Morehead City Shipbuilding Corporation, XLVII, 273.
Morgan, Confed. revenue cutter *(1861)*, XLVIII, 90.
Morgan, ex-*Lewis Cass*, U.S. revenue cutter, *(1861)*, XLVIII, 91.
Morgan, Charles S., reviews by, XLVII, 143, 146; XLVIII, 65; XLIX, 238, 307; L, 151.
Morgan, III, William Stuart, "The Commerce of a Southern Port; New Bern, North Carolina, 1783 to 1789," XLIX, 77-90; reviews by XLVII, 282; L, 65, 67.
Morison, Samuel Eliot, XLVIII, 181; XLIX, 111.
Morningstar, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Morning Star, schooner *(1825)*, L, 217.
Morris, Lieutenant Charles, XLVII, 16, 30.
Morris, Gerald E., XLVIII, 178.
Morris, Paul C., *Schooners and Schooner Barges*, reviewed, XLVII, 146.
Morris, Commodore Richard V., L, 245 ff.
Morris, Robert, Supt. of Finance, U.S.A., XLVI, 29; XLIX, 47.

Morrison, Captain James J., XLVIII, 90.
Morrison, Captain John, L, 270 ff.
Morrison, Robert, XLVI, 36; XLVIII, 274.
Morse, Edward S., mention, XLVI, 55 ff.; XLIX, 35.
Morse, Hosea Ballou, XLVIII, 221.
'Morse in Japan and His Impact There,' by John E. Thayer, XLVI, 55-65.
Mosquito, launch *(1861)*, XLVIII, 95.
Möwe (Seagull) German ex-fruit steamer *Ponga* (1916), XLVIII, 50 ff.; photo of, XLVIII, 52.
Mountain Spring, whaleship *(1856)*, L, 125.
Mountaine, William, L, 288.
Mountbatten, 1st Earl Louis, XLVI, 24.
Mudge, Benjamin, XLIX, 36.
Mugford, Captain William, between, XLVI, 15-16.
Muller, John, XLVII, 108.
Mullowney, Second Lt. John, L, 245 ff.
Munson, Drs. Eneas and Elijah, L, 98.
Murdaugh, Lt. William H., XLVIII, 99.
Murfett, Malcolm H., "Splice the mainbrace": The Story of a Naval Epic, L, 291-301.
Murfett, Malcolm, H., "What a Difference a Day Makes: The Royal Navy and the Yangtse Incident of 20-21 April 1949," XLIX, 208-225; "An Old Fashioned Form of Protectionism: The Role Played by British Naval Power in China from 1860-1941," L, 178-191.
Murray, Commodore Alexander, XLVI, 163; L, 270 ff.
Murray, Dian, 'Commerce, Crisis, Coercion: The Role of Piracy in Late Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth Century Sino-Western Relations,' XLVIII, 237-242.
Murray, John, XLVI, 155.
Muscogee, steamer (1848), XLVII, 36.
Muscoota, iron side-wheeler *(1864)*, XLVIII, 124.
Myers, Mark and John Harland, *Seamanship in the Age of Sail*, XLVII, 187.
Myers, Ramon, XLVIII, 262.

NC aircraft personnel for May 1919 flight, photo of, XLVII, 249.
NC flight track chart, May 1919, XLVII, 252.
NC-1 crew with plane at Rockaway Beach, photo of XLVII, 251.
NC-1 in water before rescue, photo of, XLVII, 254.
NC-1 on Rockaway, November 1919, photo of, XLVII, 250.
NC-1 towed by destroyer *Gridley*, photo of, XLVII, 254.
N.D. Chase, whaleship *(1854)*, L, 123.
Nagle Journal [:] A Diary of the Life of Jacob Nagle, Sailor, from the Year 1775 to 1841, The, edited by John C. Dann, reviewed, L, 65.
Naiad, British warship *(1847)*, L, 33.
Namur, 1838, photo of, L, 172.
Nanking, steamer *(1880)*, XLVIII, 127.
Napier, Lord, XLVIII, 280 ff.
Napier, Rob, 'The Ship *Sooloo* (II) of Salem 1861-1887: History and Research for Building a Model, XLVII, 119-137.
Nascopie, ship *(1933)*, L, 35 ff.
Nash, Hon. Lonson, XLVI, 213.
Nashville, steamer (1853), XLVIII, 114.
Nassau, ship *(1836)*, L, 32.
Natal, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Nath'l Winsor and Company, XLVII, 121.
Nation of Nantucket, The, by Edward Byers, XLVIII, 188.
National Waterway: A History of the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, 1769-1985, The, by Ralph D. Gray, reviewed, L, 147.
Naval apprentices at Coasters Harbor Island, 1885, photo of, XLIX, 299.
Naval Ordnance Instructions, 1852, illustration, XLVII, 113.
'Naval Strategy in the First Genoese-Venetian War, 1257-1270,' by John E. Dotson, XLVI, 84-90.
Naval War of 1812: A Documentary History, The, I, by William S. Dudley, ed., reviewed, XLVII, 214.
"Naval Technology During the American Civil War," by Dean C. Allard, XLIX, 114-122.
Naval Training Station, Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, circa 1887, photo of, XLIX, 292.
Navies, Deterrence & American Independence: Britain and Seapower in the 1760s and 1770s, by Nicholas Tracy, reviewed, L, 143.
Navi e proprietá navale a Genova, seconda metá del sec. XII, by Hilmar C. Krueger, reviewed, XLVII, 216.
Navigation Paquet, French shipping line, XLVI, 108.
'Navy Board and Merchant Shipowners, During the American War, 1776-1783, The' by David Syrett, XLVII, 5-13.
'Navy's Campaign against the Licensed Trade in the War of 1812, The,' by Michael J. Crawford, XLVI, 165-172.
Nelly Ogilvie, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
Nelms, gunboat *(1862)*, XLVIII, 94.
Nelson's Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization 1793-1815, by Brian Lavery, reviewed, L, 148.
Nemesis, side-wheel steamer *(1839)*, XLVI, 58.
Neptune, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Nereus, storeship *(1843)*, L, 33.
Nesdall, Andrew J., reviews by, XLVIII, 62; XLIX, 310.
Newburyport Woolen Manufactory, XLVI, 143.
Newell, Samuel, XLVIII, 273.
'New England Forests and British Seapower: Albion Revised,' by R. J. B. Knight, XLVI, 221-229.
New Hazard, ship *(1810)*, XLVI, 44.
New Ironsides, ironclad *(1863)*, XLVIII, 31; XLIX, 117.
Newman, Edwin B., and Augustus P. Loring, 'Some Notes on the Paper of the *Atlantic Neptune*,' XLVI, 173-178.
Newman, Commandant Timothy, L, 245 ff.
Newton, Captain Richard, XLIX, 14.
New York, steamer *(1831)*, XLVIII, 109.
New York, frigate *(1800)*, XLVI, 151; XLVII, 26; L, 245 ff.
New York and Savannah Steam Navigation Company, XLVII, 33 ff.
Niagara, screw frigate *(1850)*, XLIX, 112.
Niagara Steam Forge Works, XLVIII, 109 ff.
Nicholson, Captain James, XLVI, 30.
Nicholson, Lieutenant Joseph, XLVI, 168.
Nicholson, Captain Samuel, XLVI, 161.
"Nickel a Bucket: A History of the North Carolina Shrimping Industry, A," by William N. Still, Jr., XLVII, 257-274.
Nicolle, David, "Shipping in Islamic Art: Seventh Through Sixteenth Century AD,", XLIX, 168-197.
Nicolosi, Anthony S., "The Founding of the Newport Naval Training Station, 1878-1883, An Exercise in Naval Politics,", XLIX, 291-304.
Nimbo, steamer (ex-*Yung Hai*) *(1862)*, XLIX, 22.
Ninagawa, Dr. Chikumasa, XLVI, 56.
Niven, John, *The American President Lines and its Forebears, 1848-1984*, reviewed, XLVIII, 201.
Noa, U.S. destroyer *(1927)*, L, 187.
Nomads and Crusaders A.D. 1000-1368, by Archibald R. Lewis, reviewed, XLIX, 310.
Nonesuch, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Nonsuch, schooner *(1819)*, XLVII, 28.
Norfolk, brig *(1799)*, XLVI, 160; L, 245 ff.
Normandie: *Her Life and Times*, by Harvey Ardman, reviewed, XLVII, 141.
Norris, Sir John, XLVI, 226.
North American Society for Oceanic History, mention, XLVIII, 180.
Northerner, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 35.
North Carolina, ship-of-the-line *(1821)*, XLVII, 28.
North Carolina, receiving ship *(1862)*, XLVII, 114; XLVIII, 118.
North Land, ship (1894), XLVII, 195 ff.
North West, ship *(1894)*, XLVII, 195 ff.
North Wind, ship *(1890)*, *XLVII*, 194.
Northern King, ship *(1890)*, XLVII, 194.
Northern Light, ship *(1888)*, XLVII, 193.

Northern Pacific, ship (1914), XLVII, 202.
Northern Queen, ship *(1980)*, XLVII, 194.
Northern Star, ship *(1890)*, XLVII, 194.
Northern Steamship Company, XLVII, 193 ff.
Northern Theater in the Civil War—The USS *Michigan* and Confederate Intrigue on the Great Lakes, The, by Bradley A. Rodgers, XLVIII, 96-105.
Northern Wave, ship *(1890)*, XLVII, 194.
Norvik, tanker *(1942)*, L, 44.
"Not for Conquest But Discovery," Rediscovering the Ships of the Wilkes Expedition, by Dana M. Wegner and Philip K. Lundeberg, XLIX, 151-167.
Novelty Iron Works, XLVIII, 111 ff.
Novelty Iron Works of Stillman, Allen & Company, XLVII, 40.
Novelty, steamboat *(1830)*, XLVIII, 111.
Nueva Lista Documentada de los Tribulantes de Colón en 1492, by Alicia B. Gould, reviewed, XLVI, 126.
Nymph, brig *(1799)*, XLVI, 162.

Occacock, illustration of actual survey map, 1795, XLIX, 79.
Ocean Bride, ship *(1860)*, XLVII, 104.
Ochterlony, David, XLVI, 6 ff.
Odell, John, XLVI, 261.
Ohio, bark *(1857)*, L, 125.
Okumiya, Lieutenant Masatake, Japanese commander, L, 260 ff.
Ola M. Balcom, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Olcott, Jr., A. Van Santvoord, review by, L, 70.
Old Butch, S. Crocker yacht (ex-*Seacrest*) *(1949-61)*, XLVIII, 185.
"Old Fashioned Form of Protectionism: The Role Played by British Naval Power in China from 1860-1941, An," by Malcolm H. Murfett, L, 178-191.
On the Northwest: Commercial Whaling in the Pacific Northwest, 1790-1967, by Robert Lloyd Webb, reviewed, L, 152.
O'Leary, Wayne M., 'The Maine Transatlantic Salt Trade in the Nineteenth Century,' XLVII, 83-107; review by, 284.
Oliver, Robert, XLVI, 142.
Oltenia, tanker *(1942)*, L, 46.
Olyphant, David W. C., XLVI, 35; XLVIII, 275.
Onondaga, double-turreted monitor, *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Onslow, John James, R. N., L, 31.
Onslow, Captain R. G., L, 49.
Ontario, sloop *(1775)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
Oregon, brig *(1838)*, XLIX, 155.
"Oregon" gun, photo of, XLIX, 103.
Oriental Limited, passenger train, illustration, XLVII, 200.
Oriflamme, ship *(1863)*, XLIX, 22.
"Orkney Marine Disasters Changed the Course of History," by Tom H. Inkster, L, 127-131.
Osaka, steamer (ex-*Shangai*), *(1827)*, XLIX, 27.
Oswego, sloop *(1755)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
Otsucho Maru, steamer (ex-*Union*), *(1865)*, XLIX, 26.
Oudemans, A. C., XLVI, 214.
Our Lady of Good Faith, Spanish ship *(1629)*, XLIX, 259.
Owsley, Jr., Frank Lawrence, *The* C.S.S. Florida: *Her Building and Operations*, reviewed, XLIX, 236.

Pacific Mail Steamship Company, XLVII, 43; XLVIII, 114 ff.
Padelford, Edward, XLVII, 34.
Padelford, Fay & Company, Shippers and Merchants, XLVII, 35.
Padtbrugee, Robert, L, 285.
Page, Captain, XLVIII, 239 ff.
Paine, Thomas, XLVIII, 30.
Palladium, whale ship *(1821)*, L, 213 ff.
Pallas, ship *(1784)*, XLVI, 32.
Palmer, brig *(1824)*, L, 216.
Palmer, Surgeon James, XLIX, 153.
Palmer, Michael A., L, 270 ff.
Palos, American gunboat *(1927)*, L, 260 ff.
Panama Railroad Company, XLVIII, 113.
"*Panay* Revisited: A Maritime Perspective, The," by David H. Grover, L, 260-268.
Panay, U.S. Navy gunboat *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Panay, Salem East Indiamen *(1877)*, XLVI, 63; XLVI, 63; XLVIII, 120.
Panting, Gerald E. and Lewis R. Fischer, *Change and Adaptation in Maritime History: The North Atlantic Fleets in the Nineteenth Century*, reviewed, XLVII, 64.
Papers of Robert Morris, 1781-1784, The, by E. James Ferguson, et al, reviewed, XLVII, 54.
Paradise Lost and Found: The Pacific Since Magellan, Volume III, by O. H. K. Spate, reviewed, XLIX, 319.
Park, Captain Weare, L, 213.
Parker & Company, Daniel, XLVI, 29.
Parker, Captain Hyde, XLVI, 165.
Parker, Dr. Peter, XLVI, 37.
Parrott, Robert, XLIX, 111.
Parry, Edward, XLVI, 13.
Parry, Captain W. E., L, 49.
Passage from Sail to Steam, by L. R. W. Beavis, reviewed, XLIX, 63.
'Passenger Ships in the Coastwise Trade: American Public Policy Since 1789,' by Mark D. Aspinwall, XLVIII, 173-177.
Passiac, armored vessel *(1862)*, XLVIII, 122.
Patapsco, ship-sloop (1799), XLVI, 151; XLIX, 45.
Patapsco, monitor *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Pathfinder, schooner *(1911)*, XLIX, 278.
Pathway Out of Debt: The Privateering Activities of Sir John Hippisley During The Early Stuart Wars with Spain and France, 1625-30, A, by John Appleby, XLIX, 252-261.
Patoka, USS cruiser *(1921)*, XLVI, 250.
Patridge, Captain Dan, XLIX, 25.
Patten, Richard, XLVI, 262.
Patterson, Captain Howard, XLIX, 206.
Patterson, John, L, 202 ff.
"Pat Bellinger and the May 1919 Transatlantic Flight," by Paolo E. Coletta, XLVII, 249-256.
Paul H. Harwood, tanker *(1940)*, XLVII, 52.
Peabody Academy of Science, XLVI, 60.
Peabody & Company, Henry W., XLVI, 63.
Peabody, George, XLVI, 60.
Peacock, sloop-of-war *(1838)*, XLVI, 45; XLIX, 152; photo of model, 158.
Peck, Professor W. D., XLVI, 217.
Peking, ship *(1984)*, XLVI, 25.
Pelican State, ship *(1852)*, XLVII, 86.
Pelzer, John D., "Armed Merchantmen and Privateers: Another Perspective On America's Quasi-War With France, L, 270-280.
Pendergrast, Commander C. J., XLVI, 231.
Pennsylvania Packet ship *(1805)*, *XLVIII, 250 ff.*
Pennsylvania, steamer *(1831)*, XLVIII, 109.
People of the Sea, The Maritime History of the Channel Islands, A., by A. J. Jamieson, reviewed, XLVIII, 196.
Peoples Liberation Army (PLA), L, 291 ff.
Pepperrell, Sir William, XLVIII, 25.
Pepys, Samuel, L, 19 ff.
Pequod, ship, XLVI, 197.
Percival, Captain John, XLVII, 169 ff.
Periplus Maris Erythraei, 'Sailing Guide to the Red Sea,' XLVIII, 149.
Perkins, S. G., XLVI, 213.
Perkins, Lt. Commander George W., XLVIII, 93.
Perkins, Col. Thomas H., XLVI, 213; XLVIII, 246.
Perry, U.S. brig *(1863)*, L, 93.
Perry, Hamilton Darby, L, 260 ff.
Perry, Commodore Matthew Calibraith, XLVI, 50; XLVII, 30, 174 ff.; L, 107.
Perry, Commodore Oliver H., XLVII, 27.

"Pestilence From the Sea and American Quarantine Policy," by Robert G. Hancock, Jr., L, 94-106.
Petral, (ex-*William Aiken*) privateer *(1861)*, XLVIII, 93.
Pettitt, Henry G., 'They Were a Class Apart,' The Story of Life Aboard One of the Four-Stack Flush Deck Destroyers in the Years Between the Two World Wars, XLVI, 240-251.
Phaeton, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.
Philadelphia, Continental Navy gondola *(1776)*, XLVII, 109.
Philadelphia, warship (1799) XLVI, 151 ff.; photo of the building, 153; XLVII, 14 ff.
Philadelphia, Continental gundalow, *(1935)*, XLIX, 39.
Philadelphia on the River, by Philip Chadwick Foster Smith, reviewed, XLIX, 313.
"Philadelphia Steamboat of 1796, The," by Melvin H. Jackson — supplemented, edited and illustrated by Paul Forsythe Johnston, L, 201-218.
Philip, Cynthia Owen, *Robert Fulton, A Biography*, reviewed, XLIX, 238.
Phillip Allen, Confed. cutter *(1860)*, XLVIII, 90.
Phillips, J. R. S., *The Medieval Expansion of Europe*, reviewed, XLIX, 233.
Phillips, Owen, XLVI, 105.
Philo-Parsons, steamer *(1863)*, XLVIII, 101.
Phoenician war vessel, photo of, L, 196.
Photographic Portraits of American Ocean Steamships 1850-1970, reviewed, L, 69.
Pickens, (ex-*Robert McCelland*) Confed. revenue cutter, I(1861), XLVIII, 89 ff.
Pickering, Timothy, Secretary of State, L, 270 ff.
Pickman, Dudley Leavitt, XLVII, 119 ff.
Pickman, William D., XLVII, 120.
Pierrepont, Constable, XLVIII, 265.
Pigeon, Navy tug, *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
Pilgrim, ship *(1864)*, XLVII, 121.
Pimpernel, HMS ship *(1942)*, L, 44.
Pinckney, Major General Charles Cotesworth, XLVI, 141; XLVII, 22; L, 270 ff.
Pinedo, Captain José, L, 31.
Pink, HMS corvette *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Pinkney, Attorney General William, XLVI, 170.
"Pistols and Honor: The James Barron-Stephen Decatur Conflict, 1798-1807," by William M. P. Dunne, L, 245 ff.
Pitt, Maria Harriet, XLVI, 47.
Pitt, William, XLVI, 24.
Pittsburgh, USS destroyer *(1921)*, XLVI, 249 ff.
Plan of 8-incher and carriage carried on *Princeton* (1846), XLIX, 110.
Planicus, Petrus, L, 281.
Pleasonton, Stephen, XLVII, 174 ff.
Plover, British sloop of war *(1795)*, XLIX, 45.
Plymouth, ship *(1846)*, XLVI, 238.
Pocahontas, blockade runner *(1864)*, XLVII, 31.
Polaanyi, Karl, XLVIII, 261.
Polar Sea, U.S. Coast Guard icebreaker, *(1985)*, L, 35 ff.
Polk, James K., XLVI, 239.
Polland, Leon D., XLIX, 43.
Polly, ship *(1759)*, XLVII, 12; XLVIII, 39; XLIX, 89.
Poole, Bruce M., XLIX, 35.
Pope, Dudley, *The Devil Himself: The Mutiny of 1800*, reviewed, XLIX, 235.
Popham, Commodore Sir Home Riggs, R. N., L, 30.
Porpoise, survey brig *(1838)*, XLIX, 152 ff.; photo of model, XLIX, 160.
Porpoise, H.M. Storeship (ex-*Hertigennan Af Sodermanland*) *(1780)*, XLIX, 91 ff.
Porter, Adm. David D., XLVI, 156; XLVII, 28, 112; XLVIII, 96.
Port Mahon, sloop, *(1741)*, XLVIII, 26.
Port of Quebec, map of, XLVIII, 78.
Post Boy, schooner *(1875)*, XLIX, 32.
Post, Robert C., *The Tancook Whalers: Origins, Rediscovery, and Revival*, reviewed, XLVII, 284.
Potomac, U.S. frigate *(1832)*, XLVI, 114.
Potomack, ship *(1810)*, L, 103.
Potomska, U.S.S. ship *(1863)*, L, 93.
Powars, Captain W. Frank, XLVII, 125.
Preble, Captain, XLVI, 151 ff.
Present Succession, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
President, frigate (1798), XLVI, 152 ff.; *(1815)*, XLVII, 14; XLIX, 41.
President Washington, ship *(1792)*, XLVI, 11 ff.
Preston, USS destroyer *(1927)*, L, 187.
Preyoyante, French frigate *(1798)*, L, 270 ff.
Princeton, sail plan of, 99, photo of, XLIX, 101.
Princeton, screw-propelled warship *(1842)*, XLVIII, 117.
Princeton II, screw frigate *(1851)*, XLIX, 112.
Pring, Martin, L, 6 ff.
Prins van Oranje, Netherlands frigate *(1851)*, XLVIII, 45 ff.
Prinz Eitel Friedrich, German raider, (1917), XLVIII, 53.
Pritchard, James, *Louis XV's Navy 1748-1762: A Study of Organization and Administration*, reviewed, XLVIII, 195.
Pritchard, Paul, Master Builder, XLVII, 24.
Proceedings of the Sixteenth Conference on Underwater Archaeology, by Paul Forsythe Johnston, ed., reviewed, XLVIII, 200.
Prosperity, British ship *(1747)*, XLVIII, 33.
Prosperous Fanny, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
Providence, frigate *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16, 158.
Providence, H.M.S., ship *(1795)*, L, 28.
Prows ofa *mignole*, photo of, L, 169.
Pryor, John A., *Geography, Technology and War. Studies in Maritime History of the Mediterranean, 649-1571*, reviewed, XLIX, 126-132.
"Publishing in Naval and Maritime History: A Report," by Timothy J. Runyan, XLVIII, 178-181.
Pulaski, steamer *(1838)*, XLVIII, 174.
Puritan, ironclad vessel *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Pyroscaphe, French steamboat *(1783)*, L, 205, photo, 206.

Queen, ship *(1860)*, XLVII, 104.
Queen of the Lakes, British ship *(1858)*, XLVII, 102.
Quest, S. Crocker yacht (1929), XLVIII, 184.
Quincy, William S., *The Three-Masted Schooner*, reviewed, XLVIII, 65.

R. Hilda, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Rachel Coney, brig *(1883)*, XLIX, 31 ff.
Raffles, Thomas Stamford, XLVI, 50.
Raiden Maru, whaler (ex-*Raiden*), *(1888)*, XLIX, 26.
Rainbow, HMS frigate *(1748)*, XLVIII, 34; oil painting of, XLVIII, 161.
Rainbow, sloop *(1787)*, XLIX, 88.
Raleigh, frigate *(1777)*, XLVIII, 160; XLIX, 41.
Raleigh, Sir Walter, L, 9.
Ramilies, ship *(1824)*, XLVIII, 82.
Ramsden, Jesse, XLVI, 260.
Randall, Robert W., 'Captains and Diplomats in the Río de la Plata, 1843-1846,' XLVI, 230-239.
Randall, Captain Thomas, XLVI, 29.
Randolph, frigate *(1790)*, XLIX, 41.
Randolph, Evan, "Roux Painting Mystery Solved," L, 60-62.
Rat, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
Rawdon, Lord Francis, XLVI, 20.
Ray, Dr. Isaac, XLVIII, 167.
Reach of Tide, Ring of History: A Columbia River Voyage, by Sam McKinney, reviewed, L, 149.
Read, Commodore George C., XLVII, 29, 172.
Read, Jr., James, XLVIII, 250.
Rear Admiral Stephen B. Luce, USN, photo of, XLIX, 301.
Rebecca, ship *(1801)*, XLVI, 53.

"Recently Processed Manuscript Collections in the Phillips Library at the Peabody Museum of Salem," by Gregor Trinkaus-Randall and Robert P. Spindler, XLIX, 230-231.
Rediker, Marcus, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, reviewed, XLVIII, 61.
"Reform in the United States Navy: The 'Plucking' of Officers in the Latter 1850s," by Howard C. Westwood, L, 107-118.
Reilly, Jr., John C., *United States Navy Destroyers of World War II*, reviewed, XLVII, 144.
Reliance Machine Company, XLVIII, 118
Relief, storeship *(1838)*, XLIX, 152 ff.; photo of model, XLIX, 159.
Remaking of the English Navy by Admiral St. Vincent—Key to the Victory Over Napoleon, The, by Charles B. Arthur, reviewed, XLVIII, 190.
Renown, HMS ship *(1942)*, L, 49.
Rensselaer Iron Works, XLVIII, 107 ff.
Resolution, Captain Cook's ship, *(1780)*, L, 128.
Revenge, ship *(1627)*, XLIX, 254.
'Revenue Marine Service: The Nucleus of the Confederate Navy,' by Ralph W. Donnelly, XLVIII, 87-95.
Reynolds, Clark G., review by, XLVIII, 206; XLIX, 314.
Reynolds, Enos and Sarah, XLVI, 43.
Reynolds, Stephen, XLVI, 43 ff.; portrait of, XLVI, 45.
R.L. Hague International Lifeboat Racing Trophy, XLVII, 51.
Rich, Captain Richard, XLVI, 217.
Richard William Canadian schooner, XLIX, 283.
Richardson, Charles, XLVI, 59.
Richardson, Lieutenant M. T., XLVI, 243.
Richmond, warship *(1798)*, XLVI, 151 ff.; *(1857)*, L, 122.
Ridderkerk, Dutch ship *(1783)*, XLVII, 245.
Riggers's Apprentice, by Brian Toss, reviewed, XLVII, 56.
Ringgold, Cadwalader, explorer, XLVII, 29.
Ritchie, Robert C., *Captain Kidd and the War against the Pirates*, reviewed, XLVII, 282.
Roach, John, XLVI, 62.
Roanoke, armored vessel *(1864)*, XLVIII, 125; XLIX, 112.
Robbertsz, Robbert, L, 284.
Robbins, Sarah Fraser, mention, XLIX, 37.
Robbins, Professor Stanley L., L, 95.
Robert E. Lee, blockade runner *(1863)*, XLVIII, 99.
Robert F. Stockton, screw steamer *(1838)*, XLIX, 96.
Robert Fulton, A Biography, by Cynthia Owen Philip, reviewed, XLIX, 238.
Robert McClelland, Confederate cutter *(1861)*, XLVIII, 87.
Robertson, John, XLVII, 109.
Robinson, Dwight E., 'Secret of British Power in the Age of Sail: Admiralty Records of the Coasting Fleet,' XLVIII, 5-21.
Roccafortis, large nef, *(1264)*, XLVI, 89.
Rochambeau, French ram (ex-*Dunderberg*) *(1865)*, XLIX, 117.
Rockets' Red Glare: The Maritime Defense of Baltimore in 1814, The, by Scott S. Sheads, reviewed, XLIX, 59.
Rodger, N.A.M., *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*, reviewed, XLVIII, 208.
Rodgers, Bradley A., 'The Northern Theater in the Civil War. The USS *Michigan* and Confederate Intrigue on the Great Lakes,' XLVIII, 96-105.
Rodgers, Commodore John, XLVII, 14; L, 89.
Rodman, Thomas, XLIX, 111.
Roe, Commander Francis A., XLVII, 103.
Rogers, Alan, "A Dangerous Sport": A Boston Boy's Life at Sea, 1820-1837," L, 211-218.
Roman, ship *(1829)*, XLVI, 36.
Romania, ship *(1864)*, XLVII, 123.
'Rome's Maritime Trade with the Far East,' by Lionel Casson, XLVIII, 149-153.
Roosevelt, Nicholas, L, 201.
Ropes, G. painting by, between, XLVI, 15-16.
Rosalba, American merchant vessel, *(1844)*, XLVI, 233.
Rose, steamer *(1865)*, XLIX, 24.
Rosier, James, XLVII, 77.
Ross, First Lt., David, L, 245 ff.
Ross, W. Gillies, *Arctic Whalers, Icy Seas*, reviewed, XLVII, 62.
Rossano, Geoffrey L., 'Launching Prosperity Samuel Townsend and the Maritime Trade of Colonial Long Island, 1747-1773,' XLVIII, 31-43.
Rousseau, Commodore Laurence, XLVI, 238.
"Roux Painting Mystery Solved," by Evan Randolph, L, 60-62.
Rover, brig *(1820)*, L, 211 ff.
Rowan, Commodore S. C., XLVII, 31.
Rowe, William, XLVIII, 264.
Rowland, Thomas Fitch, XLVIII, 119.
Royal Britain, transport *(1781)*, XLVII, 11.
Royal Hester, ship *(1756)*, XLVIII, 38.
Royal Mail, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Royal Oak, ship *(1939)*, L, 131.
Royal Republicans, the French Naval Dynasties Between the World Wars, by Ronald Chalmers Hood III, reviewed, XLVIII, 131.
Royal Yacht, schooner *(1862)*, XLVIII, 92.
Rubin, Norman N., 'Cliometrics: Its Application to Nautical Research,' XLVI, 179-187.
Rubinstein, Murray A., 'The Wars They Wanted: American Missionaries' Use of *The Chinese Repository* Before the Opium War,' XLVIII, 271-282.
Rumsey, James, L, 201.
Runyan, Timothy J., and Archibald R. Lewis, *European Naval and Maritime History, 300-1500*, reviewed, XLVI, 200.
Runyan, Timothy J., 'Ships and Fleets in Anglo-French Warfare, 1337-1360,' XLVI, 91-99; 'Publishing in Naval and Maritime History: A Report,' XLVIII, 178-181; *Ships, Seafaring and Society: Essays in Maritime History*, reviewed, XLVIII, 210.
Rush, Benjamin, L, 97.
Rush, Richard, L, 245 ff.
Russell, Jonathan, XLVII, 27.
Russia Company, XLVIII, 24.
Rutledge, Governor Edward, XLVII, 22.

Sabine, Rev. Elijah and Hannah (Clark), XLVIII, 165.
"Safe and Timely Arrival of Convoy SC 130, 15-25 May 1943, The," by David Syrett, L, 219-227.
Sager, Eric W., *Seafaring Labour, The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada 1820-1914*, reviewed, L, 231.
Saigon (ex-*Peiho*) French warship, *(1858)*, XLIX, 22.
Sail & Steam on the Northern California Coast, 1850-1900, by Wallace E. Martin, reviewed, XLVII, 217.
Sailing into the Past, by Ole Crumlin-Pedersen and Max Vinner, reviewed, XLVIII, 205.
Sailors and Scholars, the Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College, by John B. Hattendorf, B. Mitchell Sampson III, and John R. Wadleigh, reviewed, XLVIII, 186.
St. Ann, schooner *(1736)* photo of model, XLIX, 198.
St. Anne, ship *(1629)*, XLIX, 259.
St. Claire, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
St. Lawrence, frigate *(1861)*, XLVIII, 93.
St. Leon, ship *(1835)*, XLVII, 90; painting of, XLVII, 91.
St. Paul, Minneapolis & Manitoba Railway, XLVII, 193 ff.
St. Peter, French ship *(1626)*, XLIX, 256.
St. Roch, Arctic patrol schooner, *(1942)*, L, 35.
St. Vincent, Lord, XLVI, 221.
'Salem Trading Voyages to Japan During the Early Nineteenth Century,' by Peter J. Fetchko, XLVI, 50-54.
Sally, brig *(1764)*, XLVIII, 40 ff.
Sally, sloop *(1799)*, XLVI, 162.
'Sam Crocker, Boat Designer,' by Victor A. Lewinson, XLVIII, 182-185.
Sampson III, B. Mitchell, John B. Hattendorf and John R. Wadleigh,

The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College, reviewed, XLVIII, 186.
Samuel Smith, ship *(1803)*, XLVI, 53.
Samuel S. Sneeden Shipyard, XLVIII, 114.
Sancala, schooner *(1844)*, XLVI, 233.
Sand Fly, launch *(1861)*, XLVIII, 95.
Sands, John O., 'The U.S. Light-House Board: Progress through Process,' XLVII, 174-192; review by, XLIX, 317.
Sandwich, privateer schooner *(1799)*, XLVI, 162.
Sangamon, monitor *(1864)*, XLVIII, 123.
Santa Maria, Columbus' ship, XLVI, 182 ff.
Sarah, ship *(1749)*, XLVIII, 34.
Sarandí, Argentine schooner *(1820)*, L, 31.
Sargent, Captain C. L., XLVI, 215.
Sargent, William, XLVI, 217.
Sassacus, ship *(1865)*, XLVIII, 104.
Saturn, tug *(1892)*, XLVII, 127.
Savage, Captain Edward, XLVIII, 36.
Savannah, steamship *(1819)*, XLVII, 33 ff.
Savannah Steam Ship Company, XLVII, 33.
Saville, William, XLVI, 215.
Sawyer, Captain Horace B., L, 116.
Saxifrage, HMS ship *(1942)*, L, 44.
Scarborough, British ship *(1741)*, XLVIII, 26.
Schaeper, Thomas J., *John Paul Jones and the Battle of Flamborough Head: A Reconsideration*, reviewed, L, 143.
Schöffer, I. and J. R. Bruijn, *Dutch Asiatic Shipping in the 17th and 18th Centuries*, reviewed, XLVIII, 206.
Schooners in Four Centuries, by David MacGregor, reviewed, XLVI, 201.
"Schooner Rig, Its First Appearance and Development, The," by Merritt A. Edson, Jr., XLIX, 198-207.
Schooners and Schooner Barges, by Paul C. Morris, reviewed, XLVII, 146.
Schooner from Windward, by Mifflin Thomas, reviewed, XLVII, 59.
Schooner Yacht, details of, XLIX, 206.
Schroeder, John H., *Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy*, reviewed, XLIX, 237.
Schultz, Mark Roman, "Acting Master Samuel B. Gregory: The Trials of An Unexperienced Captain on the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron," L, 89-93.
Sciota, U.S. gunboat *(1864)*, XLVIII, 93.
Scotland, steamer *(1865)*, XLIX, 22.
Scott, Robert, Sailing Master, XLVII, 16.
Sea Education Association (S.E.A.), The, XLVII, 206 ff.
Seafaring Labour, The Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914, by Eric W. Sager, reviewed, L, 231.
Sea Gull, pilot boat *(1838)*, XLIX, 152 ff., photo of model, 161.
Seamanship in the Age of Sail, by John Harland, Mark Myers, reviewed, XLVIII, 187.
"Sea Power and South America: The 'Brazils' or South American Station of the Royal Navy 1808-1837," by Barry M. Gough, L, 26-34.
Sea Princess, British cruise ship *(1980)*, XLVI, 109.
Search for the Kobenhaven, The, by Captain Thomas Minto and Eric Stevens, reviewed, XLVII, 143.
Seattle, USS destroyer *(1921)*, XLVI, 249 ff.
'Second Destruction of the *Geldermalsen*, The,' by George L. Miller, XLVII, 275-281.
'Secret of British Power in the Age of Sail: Admiralty Records of the Coasting Fleet,' by Dwight E. Robinson, XLVIII, 5-21.
Seddon, James A., Confederate Sec. of War, XLVIII, 99.
Selfridge, Jr., Thomas O., *What Finer Tradition: The Memoirs of Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., Rear Admiral, U.S.N.*, reviewed, XLIX, 133.
Sennen, HMS (ex-U.S. Coast Guard cutter), *(1943)*, L, 220 ff.
Serçe Liman, medieval ship, mention, XLVI, 76.
Setsu Maru, steamer (ex-*Cuyahoga*), *(1868)*, XLIX, 25.
Seward, William Henry, Secretary of State, XLVIII, 120.
Shannon, HMS *(1812)*, XLVI, 168.
Shantung, steamer *(1861)*, XLIX, 23.
Shaping a Maritime Empire: The Commercial and Diplomatic Role of the American Navy, by John H. Schroeder, reviewed, XLIX, 237.
Shatswell, John H., XLVII, 124.
Shaw, John, XLVII, 27.
Shaw, Major Samuel, XLVI, 25.
Shaw Savill, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Shawmut, ship *(1902)*, XLVII, 200.
Sheads, Scott S., *The Rockets' Red Glare: The Maritime Defense of Baltimore in 1814*, reviewed, XLIX, 59.
Sheep Wish, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
Shenandoah, Confederate ship, *(1865)*, L, 35.
Shinpu Maru, steamer *(ex-Martin White) (1866)*, XLIX, 26.
Ship and Boat Models in Ancient Greece, by Paul Forsythe Johnston, reviewed, XLVI, 120.
'Shipbuilding for the Royal Navy in Colonial New England,' by Julian Gwyn, XLVIII, 22-30.
'Ship-Rigged Rafts and the Export of Quebec Timber,' by Eileen Reid Marcil, XLVIII, 77-86.
'Ship *Sooloo* (II) of Salem 1861-1887: History and Research for Building a Model, The,' by Rob Napier, XLVII, 119-137.
Ships of the American Revolution, by Harold M. Hahn, L, 229.
'Ships and Fleets in Anglo-French Warfare, 1337-1360,' by Timothy J. Runyan, XLVI, 91-99.
"Shipping in Islamic Art: Seventh Through Sixteenth Century AD," by David Nicolle, XLIX, 168-197.
Ship's Logobook, A., by Frank R. Farrar, reviewed, XLIX, 306.
Ships, Seafaring and Society: Essays in Maritime History, by Timothy J. Runyan, reviewed, XLVIII, 210.
Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World, by Lionel Casson, reviewed, XLVIII, 63.
Shoemaker, Lt. Charles, XLVIII, 90.
Shoho Maru, steamer (ex-*Lotus*), *(1868)*, XLIX, 23.
Shokaku Maru, steamer (ex-*Yangtsze*), *(1857)*, XLIX, 27.
Shomette, Donald G. and Robert D. Haslach, *Raid on America: The Dutch Naval Campaign of 1672-1674*, reviewed, L, 228.
Shovell, Sir Cloudesley, British admiral, XLVIII, 14.
Shubrick, Commodore William, L, 110.
Silliman, Professor Benjamin, XLVI, 219.
Silsbee, Captain, XLVI, 11.
Silsbee, Benjamin H., XLVII, 120.
Silsbee, John H., XLVII, 120.
Silsbee, Nathaniel, XLVII, 119 ff.
Simpson, III, B. Mitchell, *Admiral Harold R. Stark, Architect of Victory 1939-1949*, reviewed, 146.
Sims, Commander William S., L, 52.
Singer, Isaac, XLVIII, 130.
Sir George Gray, steamer *(1859)*, XLIX, 23.
Siren Vase, photo of, L, 194 ff.
Sirius, S. Crocker yacht *(1957)*, XLVIII, 185.
Skara Brae, in the Bay of Skaill, photo of, L, 127.
Sketch of Berry Islands, Bahamas, XLIX, 124.
Skinner, Lieutenant Commander, XLIX, 209.
Slafter, Edmund F., L, 5.
Sleigh, Jr., William B., review by, XLVIII, 186.
Small Yachts, Their Design and Construction, by C. P. Kundhart, reviewed, XLIX, 232.
Smerwick Harbour, map of, XLIX, 17.
Smith, Bernard, Andrew David and Rudiger Joppien, *The Charts and Coastal Views of Captain Cook's Voyages. The Voyage of the* Endeavor, *1768-1771, Hakluyt Society Extra Series No. 43*, reviewed, XLIX, 318.
Smith, Captain John, L, 11.
Smith, Captain Moses, XLVII, 16.
Smith, Philip Chadwick Foster, *"The Empress of China*'s Voyage, 1784-1785," XLVI, 25-33; mention, XLVI, 154; *Philadelphia on the River*, reviewed, XLIX, 313.

Smith, Rear Admiral Sir William Sidney, L, 29.
Snapper, H.B.M. brig *(1820)*, XLVII, 28.
Snare, Captain Elisha W., XLIX, 30.
Snark, ship *(1907)*, XLVI, 194.
Snell, Captain Thomas, L, 270 ff.
Snowflake, HMS corvette *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Socony-Vacuum Oil Company, L, 260 ff.
Solomon, armed sloop *(1749)*, XLVIII, 36 ff.
'Some Notes on the Paper of the *Atlantic Neptune*,' by Edwin B. Newman and Augustus P. Loring, XLVI, 173-178.
Somer, Richard, L, 245 ff.
Song of the Clyde, by Fred M. Walker, reviewed, XLVII, 57.
Sonoma, U.S. frigate *(1864)*, XLVII, 31.
Soochow, steamer (ex-*St. Theodosius*), *(1858)*, XLIX, 23.
Sooloo, clipper ship *(1877)*, XLVI, 63.
Sooloo (II), ship (1861), XLVII, 119 ff., line drawings of, 120, 126, 132, 134; at Union Wharf, Boston, XLVII, 129; color scheme chart, XLVII, 135; author's model, XLVII, 136.
Sophia Sutherland, sealing schooner, XLVI, 190 ff.
South Carolina, battleship *(1910)*, XLVII, 249.
South Carolina, merchant ship *(1798)*, XLVII, 25.
South-Carolina, revenue cutter (1798), XLVII, 24.
'South Carolina Frigate: A History of the Ship *John Adams*, The,' by W. M. P. Dunne, XLVII, 22-32.
Southerner, steamer (1846), XLVII, 35; XLVIII, 114.
"Southern Hemisphere Fur Sealing from Atlantic Canada," by A. B. Dickinson, XLIX, 278-290.
Spartiate, ship-of-the line *(1833)*, L, 32.
Sparrow, Captain Thomas, XLVIII, 95.
Spate, O. H. K., *Paradise Lost and Found: The Pacific Since Magellan*, Volume III, reviewed, XLIX, 319.
Speedwell, ship *(1602)*, L, 9; *(1628)*, XLIX, 254; *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Spence, Captain Robert T., L, 245 ff.
Sperm whales stranded ashore, photos of, XLIX, 227-228.
Spey, HMS frigate *(1943)*, L, 220 ff.
Spindler, Robert P. and Gregor Trinkaus-Randall, "Recently Processed Manuscript Collections in the Phillips at the Peabody Museum of Salem," XLIX, 230-231.
"Splice the mainbrace": The Story of a Naval Epic, by Malcolm H. Murfett, L, 291 ff.
Spofford, Tileston and Company, XLVII, 35.
Sprague, Laura F., *Agreeable Situations: Society, Commerce and Art in South Maine 1780-1830*, reviewed, XLIX, 62.
Stackpole, Edouard A., review by, XLVIII, 190; XLIX, 61.
Stancliffe, Benjamin, XLVI, 261.
Standard Oil Company, XLVII, 45 ff.; L, 260 ff.
Stanley, John Mix, XLVI, 49.
Stann, E. Jeffrey and Anne Hoffman, edited, *Voyage to the Southern Ocean: The Letters of Lieutenant William Reynolds from the U.S. Exploring Expedition, 1838-1842*, reviewed, L, 150.
Stanton, Edwin M. Secretary of War, XLVIII, 98.
Staunton, Sir George, XLVIII, 256.
Stavorinus, Johan Splinter, L, 287.
Stead, Gordon W., *A Leaf Upon the Sea: A Small Ship in the Mediterranean, 1941-1943*, reviewed, L, 140.
Steam Boat Company of Georgia, XLVII, 34.
Steamboat on the Chesapeake Emma Giles and the Tolchester Line, by David C. Holly, reviewed, XLVIII, 209.
'Steamers to Savannah: The Origins and Establishment of the New-York and Savannah Steam Navigation Company,' by James P. Delgado, XLVII, 33-44.
Steele, Ian K., *The English Atlantic, 1675-1740*, reviewed, XLVIII, 64.
Steinmuller, Captain A. C., XLVII, 49.
Steller, Georg W., *Journal of a Voyage with Bering, 1741-1742*, reviewed, L, 140.
'Stephen Reynolds' Influence on Business and Culture in Hawaii, 1823-1855,' by Pauline N. King, XLVI, 43-49.
Stephens, Captain Tristram, XLIX, 255.
Stevenson, Sir Ralph, XLIX, 211.
Sterling Castle, British warship *(1760)*, XLVIII, 39 ff.
Stevens, Consul Edward, XLVI, 160 ff.
Stevens, Edwin, XLVIII, 274 ff.
Stevens, Eric and Captain Thomas Minto, *The Search for the Kobenhaven*, reviewed, XLVII, 143.
Stevens, Hawley, review by, XLVII, 143.
Stevens, John, L, 201.
Stevenson, Captain William, L, 211.
Stewart, Commodore Charles, L, 117.
Stewart, Robert, son of King James V., L, 127 ff.
Stewart, Captain William Robert, XLVI, 50.
Stiles, Captain G., XLVI, 53.
Still, Jr., William N., "A Nickel a Bucket: A History of the North Carolina Shrimping Industry," XLVII, 257-274; 'Monitor Companies: A Study of the Major Firms That Built the USS *Monitor*,' XLVIII, 106-130; review by, XLVI, 129.
Stimers, Captain Albin C., XLVIII, 123.
Stockton, Lt. Robert F., XLVIII, 116; XLIX, 96.
Stoddard, Daniel, XLVII, 128.
Stoddard, William, XLVIII, 33.
Stoddert, Benjamin, Secretary of the Navy, XLVI, 147; XLVII, 23; L, 270 ff.
Stone, Robert, XLVII, 119 ff.
Stone, Silsbee and Pickman, XLVII, 119 ff.
Stone, Silsbee, Pickman & Allen, XLVI, 63.
Stonewall, twin-screw *(1865)*, XLIX, 119.
Storer, Dr. D. Humphreys, XLIX, 34.
'Storm Along: An American Sea Anthology,' A Manuscript by Joanna Carver Colcord in the Collection of the Peabody Museum of Salem, by Mary Malloy, XLVI, 111-119.
Storm King, schooner barge *(1892)*, XLVII, 127.
Story, Dana, *Building the Blackfish*, reviewed, L, 151.
Strain, Lt. Commander George, L, 291 ff.
Stringham, Commander Silas K., XLVII, 29.
Stromness, Orkney Island, photo of, L, 128.
Stuart, Charles B., U.S. Navy, XLIX, 104.
Sturtevant, USS destroyer *(1921)*, XLVI, 247 ff.
Styles, Rutherford, XLVIII, 50 ff.
'Subscription Warships of 1798, The,' by Frederick C. Leiner, XLVI, 141-158.
Success, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Sumner, Senator Charles, L, 113.
Sunday naval recruit parade, Coasters Harbor Island, 1914, photo of, XLIX, 297.
Sunderland, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
Sunflower, HMS corvette *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Susquehanna, steam frigate *(1853)*, XLVI, 58.
Sussex, British ship *(1916)*, XLVIII, 56.
Suttor, Marc, "A History of Fluvial Navigation: The Example of the Meuse," L, 166-177.
Suwonada steamer *(1864)*, 23, XLIX, 23.
Swallow, British post office packet *(1812)*, XLVI, 168.
Sweepstake, ship *(1626)*, XLIX, 255.
Sweet, Dick, mention, XLVII, 281.
Swiftsure, steamboat *(1823)*, XLVIII, 80 ff.
Symington, William, photo of model steamboat, L, 208; photo of model marine steam engine 1788, 209.
Syrett, David, "The Navy Board and Merchant Shipowners During the American War, 1776-1783," XLVII, 5-13; "H. M. Storeship *Porpoise*, 1780-83," XLVII, 91-95; review by, XLIX, 133; "The Battle for Convoy TM 1, January 1943," L, 42-50; "The Safe and Timely Arrival of Convoy SC 130, 15-25 May 1943," L, 219-227.

Table I—Salt Ships Arriving at Maine Ports, XLVII, 93.
Table 1—What Diameters in the Rough State Will Make Masts, Yards and Bowspreets for a Ship of Each Class, XLVI, 222.

Table 2—Yards and Bowsprits: Average Annual Consumption 1756-1782, XLVI, 226.
Table II—Departures of Liverpool Salt Ships for Main Ports, XLVII, 95.
Table III—Subsequent Destinations of Vessels in Salt Trade, XLVII, 96.
Table IV—Comparative Triangular Routes for Vessels in Salt Trade, XLVII, 97.
Table V—Home Ports of Salt Trade Vessels, XLVII, 98.
Table VI—Characteristics of Vessels in Salt Trade, XLVII, 99.
Table of Prizes taken by Sir John Hippisley's Privateer, 1625, XLIX, 259.
Tabulation of Consequa's Loans to Americans, list of, XLVIII, 259.
Tai-Wan, steamer *(1867)*, XLIX, 22.
Takao Maru, steamer (ex-*Ashuelot*), *(1869)*, XLIX, 25.
Talbot, Master Commandant Cyrus, L, 245 ff.
Talbot, Captain Silas, XLVI, 159.
Tamaha, merchant ship *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Tancook Whalers: Prigins, Rediscovery, and Revival, The, by Robert C. Post, reviewed, XLVII, 284.
'Tankers in the Patuxent: The ESSO Fleet Lay-Up Site in the 1930s,' by Merle T. Cole, XLVII, 45-53.
Tarbell, Joseph, XLVII, 27.
Tarleton, Brigadier General Banastre, XLVI, 19 ff.
Tate, E. Mowbray, *Transpacific Steam*, reviewed, XLVIII, 132.
Tay, ship *(1806)*, XLVIII, 239.
Tay, HMS frigate *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Tayler, R. W., XLVII, 184.
Taylor, John, XLVII, 119 ff.
Taylor, Justin E., XLVI, 63; XLVII, 119.
Tea packing for purchase, photo of, XLVIII, 251.
Teagle, C. W., lifeboat *(1935)*, XLVII, 51.
Teal, HMS frigate *(1930)*, L, 188.
Telos, brig (1883), XLIX, 29 ff.
"*Telos*, the Last American Brig and Bangor River's 'Class of '83'," by Lawrence Carroll Allin, XLIX, 29-33.
Tenedos, HMS frigate *(1813)*, XLVI, 165.
Tenerife Coaling Company, XLVI, 105.
Tennessee, ironclad *(1863)*, XLIX, 119.
Tennessee, steamer, (ex-*Muscogee*) (1848), XLVII, 38 ff.; lithograph of vessel, XLVII, 39; line drawings of vessel, XLVII, 40, 41.
Termagant, British sloop of war (1795), XLIX, 45.
Terror, ship *(1845)*, L, 128.
Thames, wooden screw (ex-*Viborg*), *(1847)*, XLIX, 26.
Thaxter, Samuel, XLVI, 260.
Thayer, John E., 'Morse in Japan and His Impact There,' XLVI, 55-65.
'They Were a Class Apart,' The Story of Life Aboard One of the Four-Stack Flush Deck Destroyers in the Years Between the Two World Wars, by Henry G. Pettit, XLVI, 240-251.
Thos. A. Metcalf, steamer *(1847)*, XLVII, 34.
Thomas Hunt & Company, XLIX, 25.
Thomas, Mifflin, *Schooner from Windward*, reviewed, XLVII, 59.
Thompson, Richard W., Secretary of the Navy, XLIX, 293.
Thompson, Captain Thomas, XLIX, 49.
Three Brothers, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Three Sisters, brig *(1784)*, XLVI, 10 ff.
Three Sisters, sloop (1788), XLIX, 86.
Three-Masted Schooner, The, by William S. Quincy, reviewed, XLVIII, 65.
"Through the 'Golden Mist' : A Brief Overview of Armada Historiography," by Douglas Knerr, XLIX, 5-13.
Thynne, Sir Henry, XLVII, 77.
Tilbury, British ship *(1757)*, XLVIII, 29.
Tilley, A. F., "Warships of the Ancient Mediterranean," L, 192-200.
Tilley, John A., reviews by, XLVI, 122; XLVII, 55, 59: XLIX, 61.
Tilley, John A., *The British Navy and the American Revolution*, reviewed, XLIX, 315.
Timothy Field, brig *(1883)*, XLIX, 31 ff.
Tod, Giles M. S., review by, XLVII, 142; XLVIII, 188.
Toombs, Senator Robert, L, 113.
Toss, Brian, *The Rigger's Apprentice*, reviewed, XLVII, 56.
Towboats and Tugs, edited by Elizabeth Stanton Anderson, L, 139.
Towne, Captain Solomon, XLVI, 26.
Townsend, Charles Haskell, XLIX, 38; L, 119.
Townsend, Chauncey, XLVIII, 26.
Townsend, Dr. James, XLVIII, 37.
Townsend, Robert, XLVIII, 42.
Townsend, Samuel, XLVIII, 31 ff.
Townsend, Captain Solomon, XLVIII, 43.
Townshend, Rt. Hon. Lord J., L, 32.
Tracy, Ira, XLVIII, 274.
Tracy, Nicholas, *Navies, Deterrence & American Independence: Britain and Seapower in the 1760s and 1770s*, reviewed, L, 143.
Trade Designations of Protected British Vessels, Table III, XLVIII, 9.
Trafalgar, steamer *(1871)*, XLIX, 24.
Trafalgar and the Spanish Navy, by John D. Harbron, reviewed, XLIX, 314.
Training Squadron off Coasters Harbor Island, Newport, circa 1885, photo of, XLIX, 294.
Transmediterránea, Spanish shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Transpacific Steam, by E. Mowbray Tate, reviewed, XLVIII, 132.
Trawler-*Northern Spray*, HM *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Tredegar Iron Works, XLVIII, 110.
Tregantle, British steamer *(1916)*, XLVIII, 50.
Tremont, ship *(1902)*, XLVII, 200.
Trenton, American flagship *(1889)*, XLVI, 115.
Trenton, USS cruiser *(1926)*, XLVI, 240 ff.
Trial, sloop *(1750)*, XLVIII, 28.
Triall, freighter *(1606)*, XLVII, 77 ff.
"Trials of a Yankee Sailor: Robert Gray in the Río de la Plata, 1798-1802," by Jerry W. Cooney, XLIX, 272-277.
Trias, Rolando A. Laguarda, *Nueva Lista Documentada de los Tribulantes de Colon en 1492*, reviewed, XLVI, 126.
'Tribute, Defensiveness, and Dependency: Uses and Limits of Some Basic Ideas About Mid-Qing Dynasty Foreign Relations,' by John E. Wills, Jr., XLVIII, 225-229.
Trinkaus-Randall, Gregor and Robert P. Spindler, "Recently Processed Manuscript Collections in the Phillips Library at the Peabody Museum of Salem," XLIX, 230-231.
Triumph, HMS *(1915)*, L, 185.
True, Nathaniel, XLVI, 60.
Truxton, Commodore Thomas, XLVI, 159; XLVII, 25; XLIX, 44.
Tucker, Spencer C., 'U.S. Navy Gun Carriages from the Revolution through the Civil War,' XLVIII, 108-118; "U.S. Navy Steam Sloop *Princeton*," XLIX, 96-113; *Arming the Fleet: U.S. Navy Ordnance in the Muzzle-Loading Era*, reviewed, L, 145.
Tudor Ice Company, XLVI, 63.
Turkey Mill, XLVI, 175.
Turnbull, Marmie & Company, Philadelphia, XLVI, 30.
Turner, Commander Daniel, XLVI, 231.
Turner, J. M., Chief Officer, XLVIII, 239.
Turner, Obahiah, XLVI, 213.
Tuscaloosa, CSS *(1863)*, XLVIII, 95.
"Twelve-inch Wrought-iron Gun and Carriage," design of, XLIX, 107.
Twiggs, Maj. Gen. David E., XLVIII, 91.
Twin Sisters, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 19.
Two Brothers, brig *(1785)*, XLIX, 88.
Tybee, brig *(1849)*, XLVII, 42.
Tyler, John, XLVII, 172 ff.
Tyndall, Professor John, XLVII, 178.

Uncle Sam, steamer *(1868)*, XLIX, 27.
Union Star, steamer *(1862)*, XLIX, 24.

United States, frigate *(1798)*, XLVI, 8 ff, 147; L, 245 ff.
USS *Jamestown*, (1885), photo of, XLIX, 294.
USS *Minnesota*, training ship *(1875)*, XLIX, 293.
USS *New Hampshire*, flagship (1885), photo of, XLIX, 292.
USS *Richmond*, (1885), photo of, XLIX, 292.
USS *Saratoga*, *(1885)*, photo of, XLIX, 294.
USS *Vincennes*, sloop-of-war *(1838)*, XLIX, 152 ff.; photo of model, XLIX, 157.
USS *Western World*, ship *(1862)*, L, 90 ff.
U.S. Coast Survey vs. Naval Hydrographic Office. A 19th Century Rivalry in Science and Politics, by Thomas G. Manning, reviewed, XLIX, 317.
U.S. Light-House Board display, illustration of, XLVII, 186.
United States Naval Power in a Changing World, by Edwin Bickford Hooper, reviewed, L, 150.
United States Navy Destroyers of World War II, by John C. Reilly, Jr., reviewed, XLVII, 144.
'U.S. Navy Gun Carriages from the Revolution through the Civil War,' by Spencer C. Tucker, XLVII, 108-118.
United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Domestic, and United States Navy and Marine Corps Bases, Foreign, by Paolo E Coletta and K. Jack Bauer, reviewed, XLIX, 59.
"U.S. Navy Steam Sloop *Princeton*," by Spencer C. Tucker, XLIX, 96-113.
Ulysses, ship *(1804)*, between, XLVI, 15-16.
Underhill, Robert, L, 203.
'Underway Replenishment, 1799-1800,' by Tyrone G. Martin, XLVI, 159-164.
Underwood, 1st Lt. John A., XLVIII, 93.
Underwriter, tug *(1892)*, XLVII, 127.
Union-Castle, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Unity, British Ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 16.
Upham, Charles W., XLVIII, 170.
Upshur, Abel, Secretary of State, XLIX, 109.

V. Olyphant & Company, XLIX, 25.
Valle, James E., reviews by, XLVI, 202; XLVII, 142, 145, 213; XLVIII, 190, 193, 197, 208, 209; XLIX, 59, 236, 306; L, 141, 146, 148.
Van Brunt, Captain, XLVII, 115.
Van Brunt Carronade Carriage, 1843, drawings of, XLIX, 105.
Vandalia, ship *(1799)*, XLIX, 42.
van Heemskerck, Jacob, L, 284.
van den Velde, Esaias, Dutch artist, XLIX, 227.
van der Vinne, Vincent, Dutch artist, XLIX, 227.
Vanguard to Trident: British Naval Policy Since World War Two, by Eric J. Grove, reviewed, XLIX, 133.
Van Imhoff, Governor-General, XLVII, 243 ff.
Vanja, tanker *(1942)*, L, 44.
van Linschoten, Jan Huyghen, L, 282.
Vanum, Joseph, L, 270 ff.
Varuna, steamer *(1863)*, XLIX, 22.
Velasco-Simancas Map, ca. 1610, L, 14.
Verenigde Provincien, Dutch East Indiaman, *(1652)*, XLVI, 109.
Vermont, ship *(1862)*, L, 91.
Vermont, battleship *(1907)*, XLVII, 249.
Ver Steeg, Clarence L., XLVI, 27.
Vesuvius, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.
Victor, transport *(1755)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
Vidette, HMS destroyer *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
View of Canton, about 1760, XLVI, 25.
Vigilant, schooner *(1755)*, XLIX, 264 ff.
Village Belle, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Village of Woods Hole, photograph of, XLVII, 208.
Villedary, Jean, XLVI, 174.
Villiers, Sir George, XLIX, 252.
Vinner, Max and Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, *Sailing into the Past*, review by, XLVIII, 205.
Viola, steamer *(1862)*, XLIX, 25.
Virginia, frigate *(1790)*, XLIX, 41 ff.
Virginia, Confederate ironclad (ex-USS *Merrimack*) *(1862)*, XLVIII, 99, 122.
Volante, British blockade runner *(1862)*, L, 93.
Voorhees, Captain Philip F., 231.
"Voyage to Canada's Arctic Islands," by Tom H. Inkster, L, 35-41.
Voyage to the Southern Ocean: The Letters of Lieutenant William Reynolds from the U.S. Exploring Expedition, edited by Anne Hoffman and E. Jeffrey Stann, L, 150.
Vulcan, British ship *(1738)*, XLVIII, 23.
Vulcan Company, Troy, NY, XLVIII, 108 ff.

W.H.D.C. Wright, ship *(1853)*, XLVIII, 46.
W.M. Robinet & Company, XLIX, 26.
Wabash, screw frigate *(1850)*, XLIX, 112.
Waddill, Jr., Judge Edmund, XLVIII, 56.
Wade, Sir Thomas, L, 179.
Wadenaar, Heer, XLVI, 53.
Wadleigh, John R., John B. Hattendorf, and B. Mitchell Sampson III, *Sailors and Scholars, The Centennial History of the U.S. Naval War College*, reviewed, XLVIII, 186.
Wahlroos, Sven, *Mutiny and Romance in the South Seas: A Companion to the* Bounty *Adventure*, reviewed, L, 72.
Wakamuraskai, steamer (ex-*Nancai*), *(1871)*, XLIX, 26.
Wakeman, Jr., Frederic, 'China's New Historical Archives,' XLVIII, 283-285.
Walker, David, *Champion of Sail: R. W. Leyland and his Shipping Line*, XLVII, 213.
Walker, Fred M., *Song of the Clyde*, reviewed, XLVII, 57.
Walker, James, XLVIII, 77 ff.
Walker, Captain Matthew, XLVIII, 84.
Walsh, Hall & Company, XLIX, 26.
Walter Irving, ship *(1855)*, L, 122.
Wampanoag, screw steamer *(1863)*, XLVIII, 125; XLIX, 118.
Wantung, merchant ship *(1937)*, L, 260 ff.
War against the seals: a history of the North American seal fishery, The, by Briton Cooper Busch, reviewed, XLVIII, 131.
Ward, Commander J. H., XLVII, 112.
Ward, Stillman & Company, XLVIII, 112.
Warner, David T., XLVII, 46.
Warner, Deborah Jean, 'At the Sign of the Quadrant The Navigational Instrument Business in America to the Civil War,' XLVI, 258-263.
Warren Fisher, bark *(1851)*, XLIX, 123.
Warren, frigate *(1776)*, XLVIII, 158; L, 245 ff.
Warren Captain Peter, XLVIII, 22 ff.
Warrington, Lewis, XLVII, 28.
Warrior, The World's First Ironclad Then and Now, by Andrew Lambert, reviewed, XLIX, 134.
"Warships of the Ancien t Mediterranean," by A. F. Tilley, L, 192-200.
'Wars They Wanted: American Missionaries' Use of *The Chinese Repository* Before the Opium War, The,' by Murray A. Rubinstein, XLVIII, 271-282.
Washington, Conf. revenue schooner, (1837), XLVIII, 87 ff.
Washington, steamship *(1845)*, XLVIII, 114, 174.
Washington, Brigadier General William, XLVII, 22.
Water Witch, Union steamer *(1861)*, XLVIII, 90
Watt, James, drawing of steam engine, L, 204.
Waymouth, George, XLVII, 77; L, 6 ff.
Wear, HMS frigate *(1943)*, L, 220 ff.
Webb Institute of Naval Architecture, XLVII, 37.
Webb, Robert Lloyd, *On the Northwest: Commercial Whaling in the Pacific Northwest, 1790-1967*, review by, L, 152; reviews by, XLVII, 64; XLIX, 308.
Webb, William H., shipbuilder, XLVII, 36.
Webster, Daniel, XLVI, 213.
Weehawken, monitor *(1863)*, XLIX, 116.

Wegner, Dana M. and Philip K. Lundeberg, "Not for Conquest But Discovery" Rediscovering the Ships of the Wilkes Expedition, XLIX, 151-167.
Welch, William L., 'Lorenzo Sabine's History of the Fisheries,' XLVIII, 165-172.
Welles, Gideon, Secretary of the Navy, XLVII, 31; XLVIII, 120.
West Falkland, map of, XLIX, 282.
West India Company, XLVII, 6 ff.
Weston, First Lieutenant G. L., XLIX, 209.
Westward, ship *(1971)*, XLVII, 206 ff.; illustration of, XLVII, 209.
Westwood, David, *Anatomy of the Ship: The Type VII U-Boat*, reviewed, XLVII, 55.
Westwood, Howard C., "Reform in the United States Navy: The 'Plucking' of Officers in the Latter 1850s," L, 107-118.
Weymouth, sloop *(1746)*, XLVIII, 33.
Whale Ships and Whaling: A Pictorial History, by George Francis Dow, reviewed, 138.
Wharton, John, XLIX, 47.
"What a Difference a Day Makes: The Royal Navy and the Yangtse Incident of 20-21 April 1949," by Malcolm H. Murfett, XLIX, 208-225.
What Finer Tradition: The Memoirs of Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., Rear Admiral, U.S.N., review by Thomas O. Selfridge, Jr., XLIX, 133.
Wheatland, Dr. Henry, XLIX, 34.
Wheeler, John H., XLVI, 263.
Wheeler, Susan, L, 245 ff.
Whipple, William, XLVIII, 159.
White Cloud, ship *(1865)*, XLIX, 22.
White, Jr., John H., L, 201.
Whitehill, Walter, mention, XLVIII, 180; XLIX, 35.
Whitney, USS *(1926)*, XLVI, 240 ff.
Wickwire, Franklin B., 'Cornwallis in India and the American Experience,' XLVI, 18-24; review by, XLVII, 54; review by, XLVIII, 62.
Widgeon, HMS frigate *(1926)*, L, 187.
Wignall, Sidney, XLVI, 185.
Wilcocks, Benjamin Chew, XLVIII, 245 ff.
Wilkes, Lt. Charles, XLVII, 172; XLIX, 151; L, 107.
Wilkinson, John, XLVII, 5.
Willamette, paddle steamer *(1849)*, XLIX, 21.
Willard, Enoch G., XLVII, 106.
William Aiken, (ex-*Eclipse*) revenue cutter *(1860)*, XLVIII, 93.
William Jarvis, ship *(1848)*, XLVII, 92.
William & Mary, ship *(1701)*, XLVIII, 14.
William P. Frye, Am. ship *(1799)*, XLVIII, 55.
William Rockefeller, ship *(1913)*, XLVII, 45.
William Seabrook, steamer *(1848)*, XLVII, 37.
Wm. Sprague, tow boat *(1887)*, XLVII, 130.
William Wilberforce, merchant ship *(1942)*, L, 48.
William Witherle, ship *(1850)*, XLVII, 98.
William Witherle & Company, XLVII, 93.
Williams, Frederick Wells, XLVIII, 274.
Williams, John Foster, XLIX, 47.
Williams, Leonard, L, 291 ff.
Williams, Samuel Wells, XLVI, 42; XLVIII, 274.
Williams, William, XLVI, 258.
Williamson, USS destroyer *(1921)*, XLVI, 246 ff.
Willing Maid, schooner *(1789)*, XLIX, 89.
Willings & Francis, Canton firm, XLVIII, 250 ff.
Willis, Andrews, review by, XLVIII, 193.
Willis & Company, XLVII, 93.
Willock, USMC (Ret), Col. Roger, review by, XLVII, 214.
Wills, Jr., John E., 'Tribute, Defensiveness, and Dependency: Uses and Limits of Some Basic Ideas About Mid-Qing Dynasty Foreign Relations,' XLVIII, 225-229.
Wilmarth, Henry Dane, XLVI, 48.
Windrim, James H., XLVII, 181.
Winsor Map Collection, XLVI, 176.
Winston S. Churchill: Finest Hour, 1939-1941, by Martin Gilbert, XLVII, 143.
Wisconsin, battleship *(1907)*, XLVII, 249.
Wise, Henry A., XLVII, 169.
Wise, Stephen R., *Lifeline of the Confederacy[:] Blockade Running During the Civil War*, reviewed, L, 67.
Wolcott, Oliver, Secretary of the Treasury, L, 99.
Wolverine, USS (ex-*Michigan*), 1905, XLVIII, 105.
Wood, Charles, XLVIII, 77 ff.
Wood, John, XLVIII, 77 ff.
Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy, The, by N.A.M. Rodger, reviewed, XLVIII, 208.
Woodfine, Philip and Jeremy Black, *The British Navy and the Use of Naval Power in the Eighteenth Century*, reviewed, XLIX, 314.
Wycombe Marsh Paper Mills Ltd., XLVI, 175 ff.
Wyman, Commander Thomas W., XLVII, 29.

Yakumo Maru, steamer (ex-*Taoutai*), *(1862)*, XLIX, 26.
Yat Sen, nationalist ship *(1949)*, XLIX, 209.
Yale, Elihu, XLVI, 6 ff.
Yanch, ship *(1801)*, XLVII, 166.
Yangtze Rapid Steamship Company, L, 261 ff.
Yankee, brigantine *(1971)*, XLVII, 206.
Yankee Surgeon: The Life and Times of Usher Parsons 1788-1868, by Seebert J. Goldowsky, reviewed, L, 74.
Yantic Iron Works, Norwich, Connecticut, L, 202.
Yarnell, Captain Harry E., L, 51.
Yassi Ada, medieval ship, mention, XLVI, 76.
Yentsch, Dr. Clarice, mention, XLIX, 37.
Yeoward, British shipping line, XLVI, 108.
Yokohama Maru, steamer (ex-*Uncle Sam*), *(1868)*, XLIX, 27.
Yolanda, Canadian schooner *(1902)*, XLIX, 280.
Yorktown, aircraft carrier, XLVI, 152.
Yorktown, frigate *(1855)*, XLVII, 30.
Zamalek, rescue ship *(1943)*, L, 219 ff.
Zebedee and Ann, British ship *(1776)*, XLVIII, 18.
Zierikzee, East Indiaman *(1620)*, L, 285.
Zouche, Sir John, XLVII, 77.

List of vessels having compound names arranged alphabetically by their last names.

Adams, John
Age, Golden
Aiken, William
Aimé, Bien
Alexander, H. F.
All, Have at
Allen, Philip
Amadjuak, Fort
American, Fair
Ames, Ezra
An, Mei
Ann, St.
Ann and Zebedee
Anne, St.
Archbold, John D.
Balcom, Ola M.
Barbour, Hattie H.
Barge, Cleopatra
Belle, Village
Betsy, Charming
Blaze, Cumberland
Boston, City of
Boy, Post
Bride, Ocean
Britain, Royal
Brook and Ellis
Brothers, Two
Brothers, Three
Carolina, North
Carolina, South
Cass, Lewis
Castle, Sterling
Chase, N. D.
China, Empress of
City, Bayou
Claire, St.
Clark, Ida M.
Cloud, White
Coney, Rachel
Cook, H. L.
Corkum, Beatrice L.
Cramer, Corwith
Dart, Fire
de Vaudreuil, La Marquise
Dimmock, J. L.
Dodge, Henry
Dollar, Alice
Dominion, British
Donahoe, Agnes G.
Dundas, Charlotte
Eastern, Great
Elgin, Lord
Ellsworth, Albert S.
Ely, Marquis of
Emery, Dean
Fanny, Prosperous
Field, Timothy
Fish, Flying
Fisher, Warren
Fly, Sand
Foo V, Mei
Foo, Mei
Fortune, John
Frank, Little
Friedrich, Prinz Eitel
Frye, William P.
Gate, Golden
Gertrude, Alice
Good Faith, Our Lady of
Goodwill, Friends
Gray, Sir George
Green, E. H.
Greene, General
Gull, Sea
Hai-Yung
Hall, Brown
Harwood, Paul H.
Hazard, New
Herbert, Frank
Hester, Royal
Hilda, R.
Hing, Mei
Horse, Light
Horse, White
Howe, Joseph
Hsia, Mei
Hung, Mei
Hunley, H. L.
Intent, Good
Ironsides, New
Irving, Walter
Japan, Emperor of
Jarvis, William
Jay, John
Jones, Commodore
Kate, Dainty
King, Northern
King, Storm
L., Leslie
L.M., Hattie
Lakes, Queen of the
Lance, Essex
Land, North
Lane, Harriet
Larder, Annie E.
Lass, Limerick
Laws, George
Lee, Robert E.
Leon, St.
Light, Northern
Littlefield, Charlotte A.
Lord, Annie
Lytton, Empire
MacTavish, Clan
Mahon, Port
Maid, Dairy
Maid, Willing
Maria, Santa
Maru, Banryu
Maru, Genkai
Maru, Genko
Maru, Hakuno
Maru, Hiryu
Maru, Hoan
Maru, Junsoku
Maru, Kaimon
Maru, Kakumo
Maru, Keigaka
Maru, Kyorin
Maru, Nagasaki
Maru, Otsucho
Maru, Raiden
Maru, Setsu
Maru, Shoho
Maru, Shokaku
Maru, Takao
Maru, Yokohama
Marvin, E. B.
Mary & William
May, Isabel
May, Katherine
McClelland, Robert
McGilvery, Clara E.
Merida, City of
Metcalf, Thos. A.
Munsie, Florence M.
New York, City of
Nickerson, E.
Northern, Great
Oak, Royal
O'Donahue, James
Ogden, Francis B.
Ogilvie, Nelly
Oranje, Prins van
Pacific, Northern
Packard, Benjamin F.
Packet, Boston
Packet, Pennsylvania
Parsons-Philio
Peking, City of
Peter, St.
Ping, Mei
Queen Island
Queen, Northern
Randolph, John
Renfrew of Baron
Republic, Great
Republicaine, La
Return, Happy
Richard, Bonhomme
Rockefeller, William
Ross, John A.
Roy, Edward
Sam, Uncle
Sea, Polar
Seabrook, William
Sen, Yat
Sherbrooke, Lady
Sibley, Amory
Simonda, General George S.
Sisters, Three
Sisters, Twin
Smith, Florence M.
Smith, Samuel
Snare, Maud
Snow, Augusta W.
Sorley, Mary
Sprague, Wm.
Spring, Mountain
Star, Northern
Star, Union
State, Forest
State, Pelican
States, United
Stewart, Edward
Stockton, Robert F.
Succession, Present
Sutherland, Sophia
Swan, Black
Teagle, C. W.
Thayer, C. A.
Theodosius, St.
Tokio, City of
Turk, Grand
Turk, II, Grand
Vicar's, Captain
Viglance, British
Walker, Elisha
Wan, Fi
Wan-Tai
Washington, General
Washington, George
Washington, Lady
Washington, President
Watt, James
Wave, Northern
West, Northern
Western, Great
White, Martin
Wilberforce, William
Wilhelm, Kronprinz
William, Richard
Williams, Hezekiah
Wind, Northern
Wish, Sheep
Witch, Iron
Witch, Water
Witherle, William
Wedel, Minister
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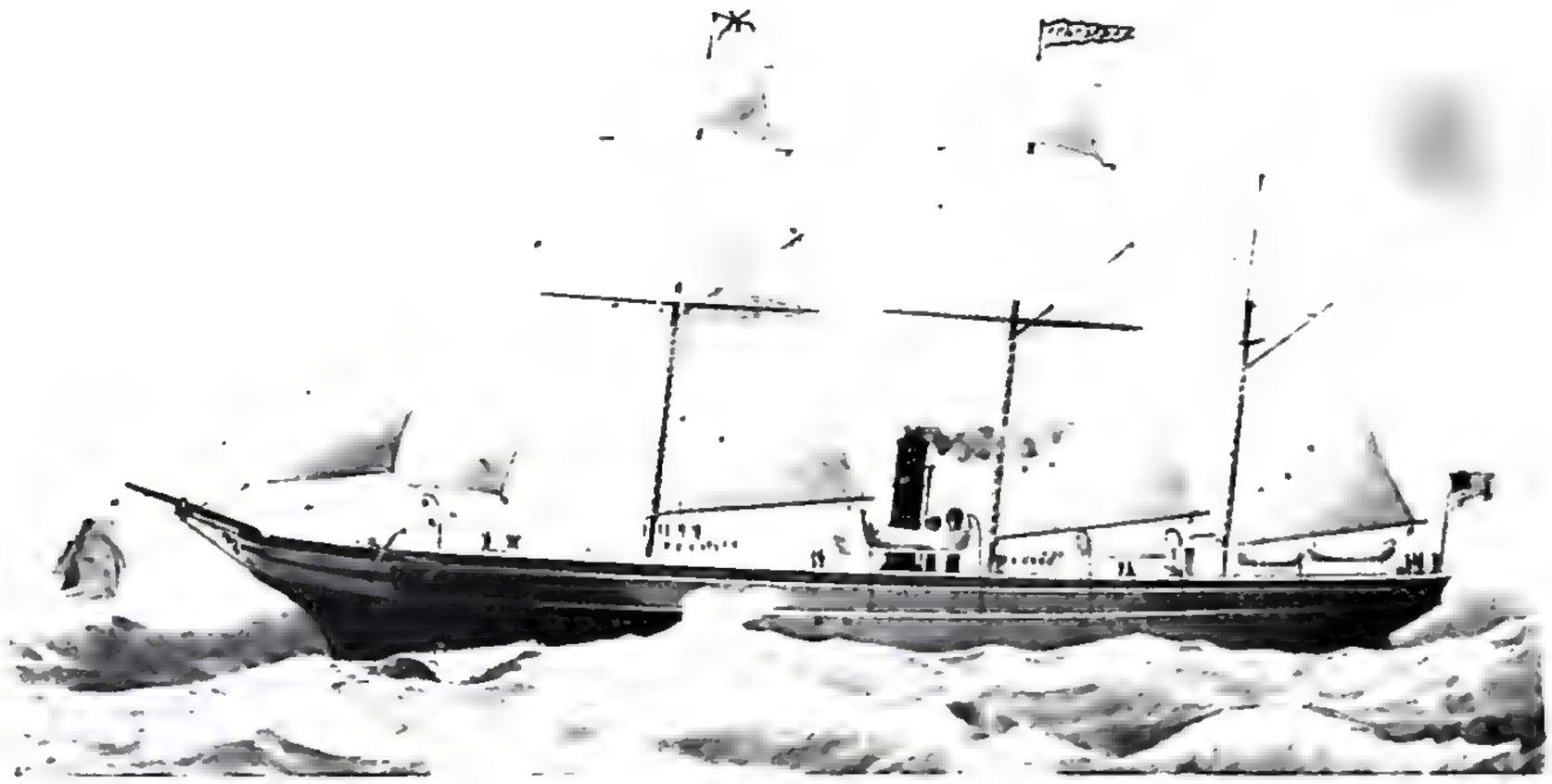

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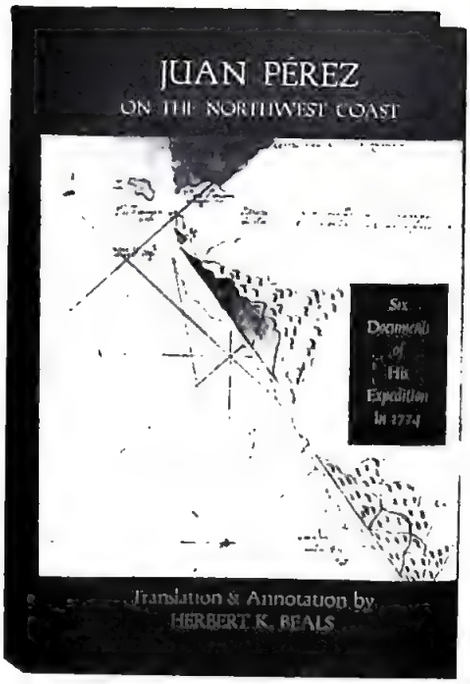

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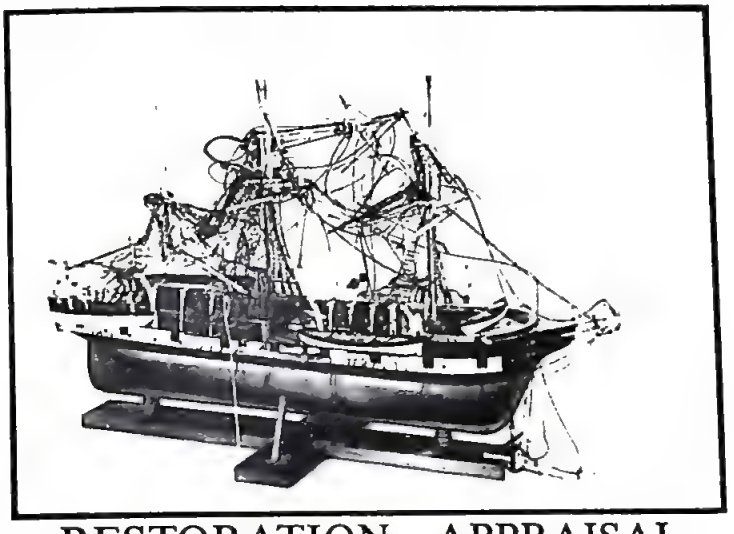

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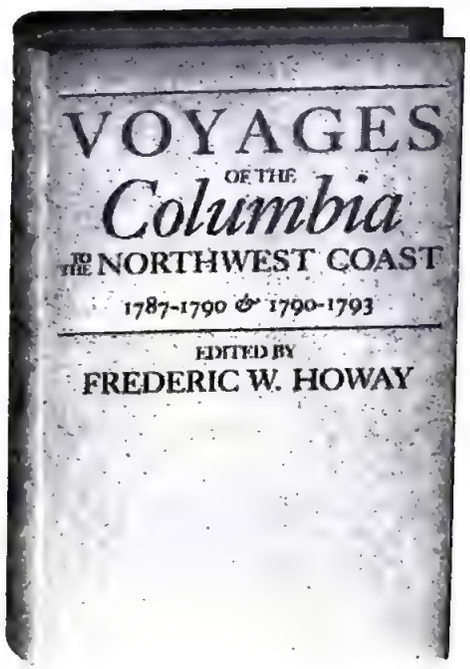

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Contents

Winter 1990

Editor's Comments 4

Latitude Errors and the New Englad Voyages of Pring and Waymouth, by JOHN H. GILCHRIST 5

Edmund Custis and His "Wreck-Fishing" Invention, by JAMES B. LYNCH, JR. 18

Sea Power and South America: The "Brazils" or South American Station of the Royal Navy 1808-1837, by BARRY M. GOUGH 26

Voyage to Canada's Arctic Islands, by TOM H. INKSTER 35

The Battle for Convoy TM 1, January 1943, by DAVID SYRETT 42

Creating the U.S. Bureau of Aeronautics, by PAOLO E. COLETTA 51

Roux Painting Mystery Solved!, by EVAN RANDOLPH 60

Book Reviews 63

Contents

Spring 1990

Acting Master Samuel B. Gregory: The Trials of An Unexperienced Captain on the South Atlantic Blockading Squadron,
by MARK ROMAN SCHULTZ 89

Pestilence From the Sea and American Maritime Quarantine Policy,
by ROBERT G. HANCOCK, JR. 94

Reform in the United States Navy: The "Plucking" of Officers in the Latter 1850s,
by HOWARD C. WESTWOOD 107

Right Whales, Not Humpbacks, Taken in Cintra Bay,
by RANDALL R. REEVES & EDWARD MITCHELL 119

Orkney Disasters Changed the Course of History,
by TOM H. INKSTER 127

Duhamel du Monceau: *Savant* and Naval Architect,
by VICTOR A. LEWINSON 132

Book Reviews 138

Contents

Summer 1990

A History of Fluvial Navigation: The Example of the Meuse,
by MARC SUTTOR 165

An Old Fashioned Form of Protectionism: The Role Played by British Naval Power in China from 1860-1941,
by MALCOLM H. MURFETT 178

Warships of the Ancient Mediterranean,
by A. F. TILLEY 192

The Philadelphia Steamboat of 1796,
by MELVIN H. JACKSON 201

"A Dangerous Sport": A Boston Boy's Life at Sea, 1820-1837,
by ALAN ROGERS 211

The Safe and Timely Arrival of Convoy SC 130, 15-25 May 1943,
by DAVID SYRETT 219

Book Reviews 228

Contents

Fall 1990

Editor's Note 244

Pistols and Honor: The James Barron-Stephen Decatur Conflict, 1798-1807 245
by W. M. P. Dunne

The *Panay* Revisited: A Maritime Perspective 260
by David H. Grover

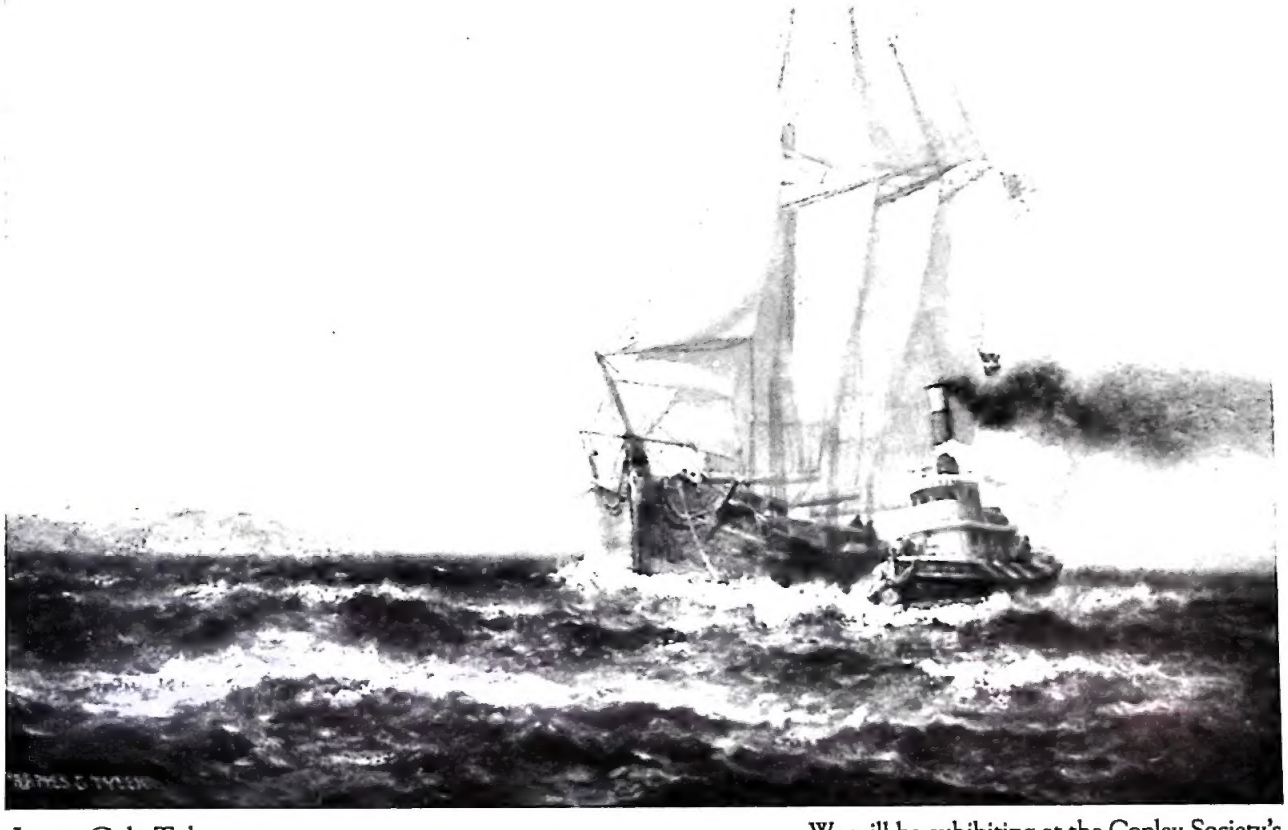
Armed Merchantmen and Privateers: Another Perspective on America's Quasi-War With France 270
by John Pelzer

Finding Longitude at Sea by Magnetic Declination on Dutch East Indiamen, 1596-1795 281
by Karel A. Davids

"Splice the Mainbrace": The Story of a Naval Epic 291
by Malcolm H. Murfett

In Memoriam: Archibald Ross Lewis 302

Index 304



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